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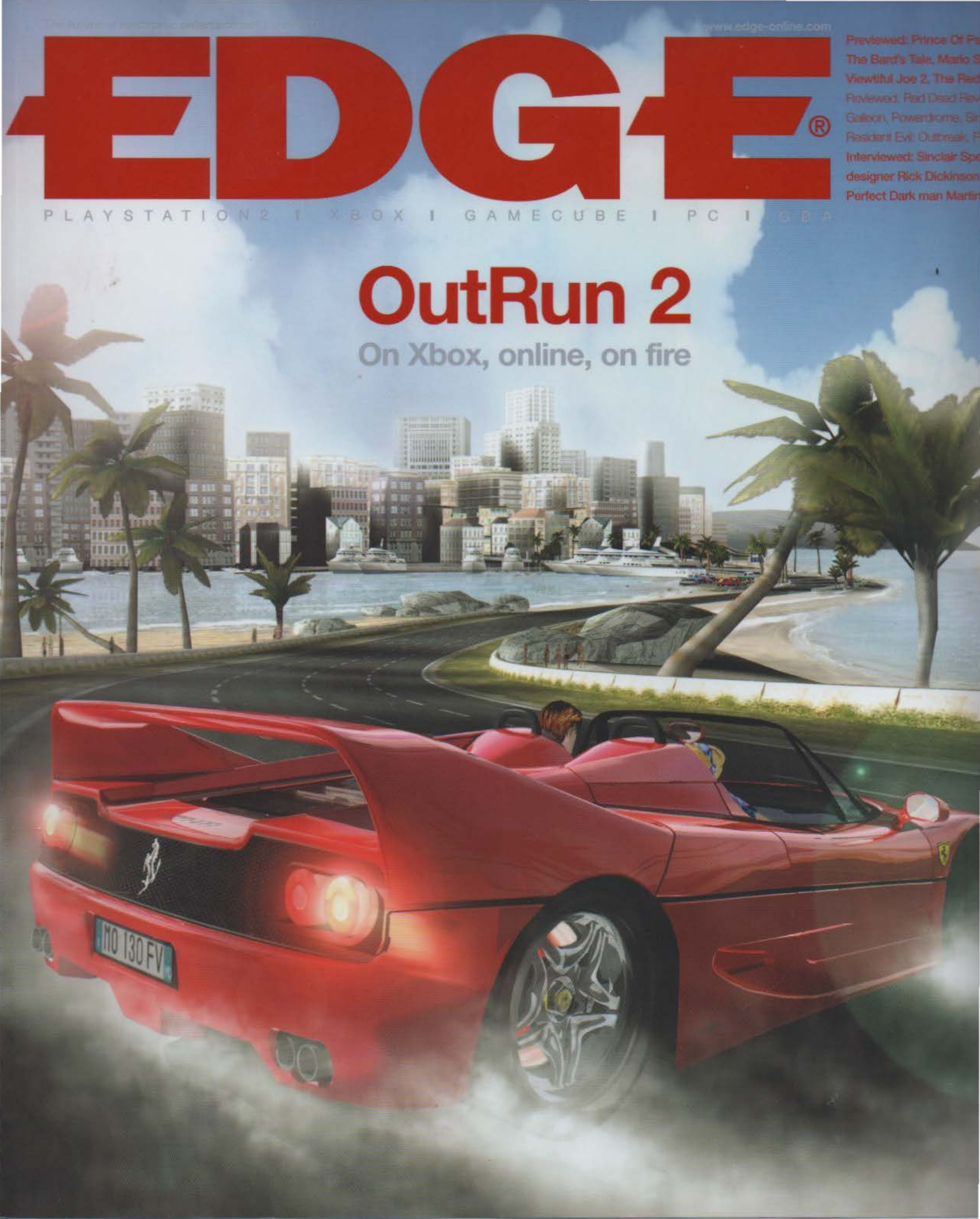
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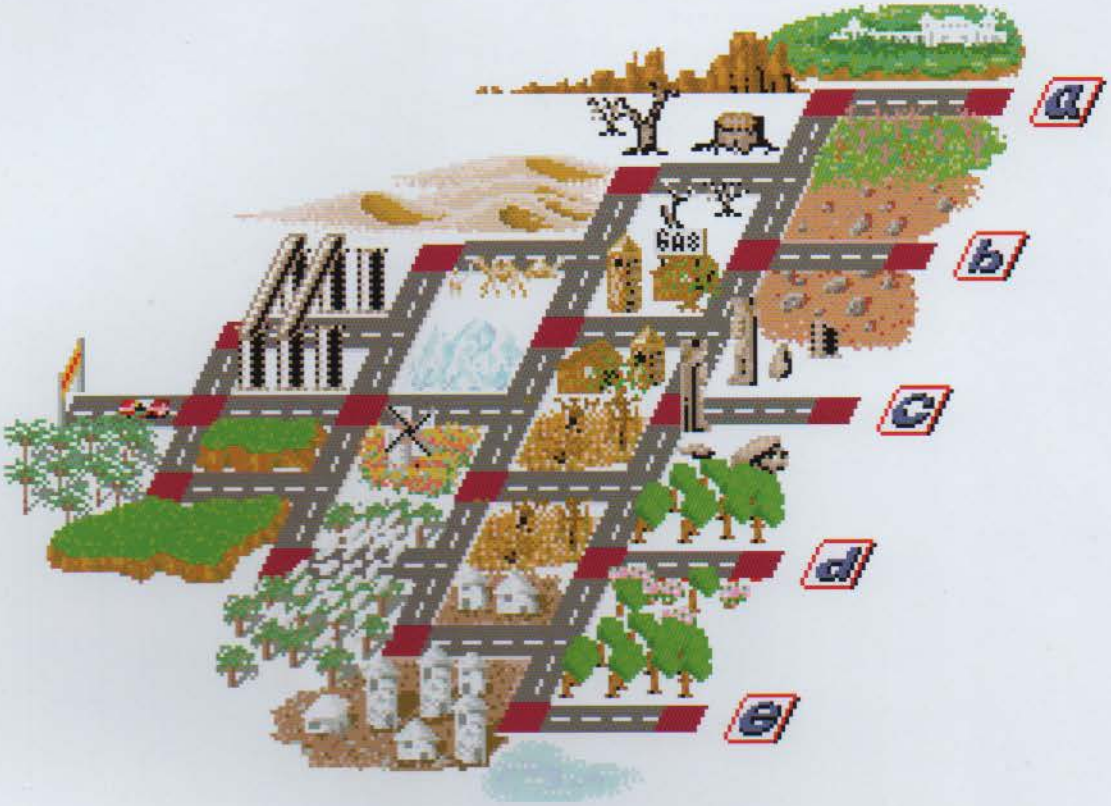
PLAYSTATION2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | PC | GBA

Previewed: Prince Of Pe
The Bard's Tale, Mario S
Viewtiful Joe 2, The Red
Reviewed: Red Dead Rev
Galleon, Powerdrome, Sin
Resident Evil: Outbreak, F
Interviewed: Sinclair Spe
designer Rick Dickinson
Perfect Dark man Martin

OutRun 2

On Xbox, online, on fire




a
b
GAS
c
d
e



So where do you start with a property as familiar and beloved as Sega's *OutRun*? If you didn't revel in its hydraulically powered extravagance when it crashed on to the arcade scene back in the '80s, you've probably played one of the home conversions, and you've certainly seen it celebrated within the pages of this magazine (and, indeed, on the cover of our ten-year anniversary issue). The most mysterious aspect of *OutRun*, in fact, concerns why, exactly, it's taken its creator so long to produce a fully fledged sequel. Think of a truly renowned gaming property of old. Think *Space Invaders*, think *Pac-Man*, think *R-Type*. Think Sega properties like *Sonic*, *Shinobi* and *Phantasy Star*. All, for better or worse, have modern-day interpretations keeping the flames alive. It seems that Sega was simply waiting for the right kind of hardware to arrive which could do justice to such a deeply revered brand. Well, now it's here.

Or rather it's been here for a while in the form of Xbox, whose architecture ostensibly powered last year's triumphant *OutRun 2* coin-op, a game now making the logical leap to the home platform, replete with those oh-so-important enhancements demanded by console users. You can read our world-exclusive report on page 60.

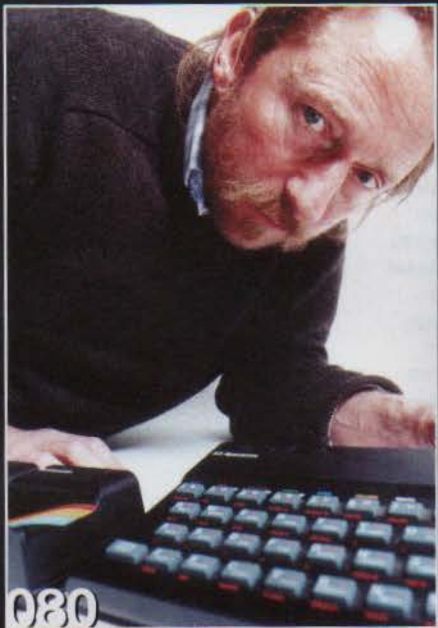
While we're talking world exclusives and classics updated for today's landscape, this issue also features an early look at *Prince Of Persia 2*, the sequel to one of the most deeply satisfying and frequently exhilarating games to appear in the last 12 months. Have a look at how it's shaping up on page 48. And don't be too alarmed by its new, darker tone.

Then there's the world-first interview with Zoonami (see page 72), the studio founded by Martin Hollis, one of the talents behind N64 classics *GoldenEye* and *Perfect Dark*.

There's certainly a lot to talk about this month. There will be next month, too, following our return from E3, when we'll be outlining which games will be worth playing at Christmas. Get ready for some surprises.



Features













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directory june

the 'never mind the hydraulics' issue









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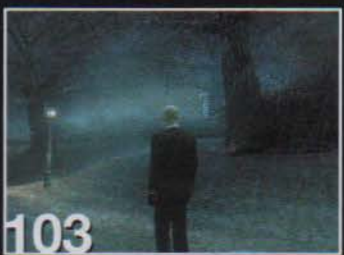
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"Well, how do you all feel now you have raped the American highways?"
"Beautiful!"











Regulars

Testscreen


Iowa State University
XBOX
Spartan



Developers look up at GDC

Despite the lack of hardware announcements, 2004's Game Developers Conference was characterised by rising levels of confidence as the industry squares up to future challenges

It didn't generate the headlines the more enthusiastic pundits expected, but the 2004 Game Developers Conference provided a crucial snapshot of the direction in which the industry is heading. Last year's concerns about creativity, licences and inequalities in the developer-publisher relationship seem to have been swept aside by a wave of positivity. Driven partly by the relief of developers who survived the peak of studio closures to make it back to San Jose for another year, it was also boosted by increasing confidence among publishers. With large numbers of games canned during 2003, they now seem to be looking to repopulate their catalogues.

Particular interest is being expressed about launch titles for the next generation of consoles. There was certainly plenty of activity at the concurrent Game Connection event, with publishers we spoke to seeing upwards of 40 game prototypes during the three days.





"It's been a good year to do business because it seems even the smaller publishers have decent amounts of money to play with," revealed one happy UK developer, who had pitched to 20-odd potential suitors.

There was little direct talk at GDC about new hardware. The hot topic concerned improving the efficiency of the development process

An extra fillip to this feeling of wellbeing is the potential of Sony's PSP. With strong support throughout the industry, many publishers hope it will act as a bridge between the peak of the current cycle and the tricky transitional years of 2005 and 2006. Significantly, most also think it will be a strong enough platform on which to launch original intellectual properties.

The first public demo of PSP software running was Backbone Entertainment's quirky *Death Jr* platformer – a game that wouldn't be viable on GameBoy Advance. Even that most conservative behemoth, EA, seems to be behind the format. John Schappert, EA Canada's general manager, suggested that as the PC market has declined or migrated to Xbox, EA, for one, is looking to Sony's handheld to provide financial insulation.

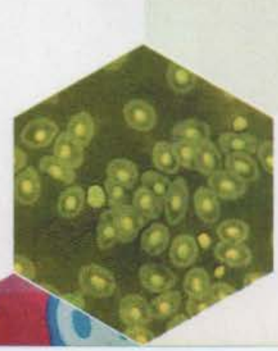
Power of the process

There was little direct talk at GDC about new traditional home console hardware, however. Instead, the hot topic (at least among more forward-thinking commentators) concerned methods of improving the efficiency of the development process. What initially seems to be dry technicality has startling implications.

For example, it currently takes about ten minutes to process a 100,000-polygon dataset into a form that can accepted and run in a game engine. Yet the processing power of the next generation of consoles will increase resolutions significantly. Some developers are already having looking at dealing with five-million-polygon datasets, which can take up to two hours to process. The concern is that unless something is done to radically change the way developers structure their art pipelines, then staffing, schedules and ultimately costs will rise exponentially.

"I think there's a growing awareness that











For the first time at GDC, the GameHotel came to town, with attendees to the crossmedia magazine show including Sony's Phil Harrison, *Rez* creator Tetsuya Mizuguchi and French video creators H5. One of the few game industry people who can be called a bona fide genius, *Sims* creator Will Wright's various GDC talks were all standing-room-only affairs. One of GDC's more surreal moments was Wright and Warren Spector arm wrestling during the *Love Story* design panel talk





Id founder John Carmack provided one of the conference highlights with his talk about developing bleeding-edge technology

we'll soon be dealing with content density an order of magnitude higher," **Adam Billyard**, Criterion's chief technology officer, explains. "Developing on a faster PC just isn't going to cut it. Even today, you can be pushing gigabytes of assets before you crunch them down. When you're looking at 20Gb, it's a different problem entirely."

This is why Criterion has created what it's calling an 'asset conditioning pipeline.' This offline architecture is designed to process huge amounts of data into a form a game engine can use. Integrated within an early release of RenderWare 4, it's now being rolled out to beta clients. "If we don't figure this out, game development is going to end up like the movies, where you need 24 hours in a render farm to get anything done," warns Billyard.

Another proponent of such thinking was id's **John Carmack**. Lost in the trivia of whether or not he actually proposed *Quake II Redux* – a tarted-up version of *Quake II* using the *Doom 3* engine – the main point of Carmack's programming keynote was that the length of time it takes to author game content is becoming unsustainable.

"In *Wolfenstein*, we could create levels in an hour, but with the current generation it can take a week to build a room that looks good, then it's months to get it through playtesting," he revealed. Id's solution will be to take a more strategic view and attempt to build media libraries, share assets with its satellite studios, such as Raven, and reuse existing assets. "We're hoping with our next title we will be able to share some of *Doom 3*'s assets," he said, adding that this would obviously restrict the scenario. "It will have to be a present-day or near-future thing where we can use the fire extinguishers and waste baskets," he joked.

And as if any example was needed to back up Billyard and Carmack's comments, it came from Epic. The company's Unreal engine demos have become something of a GDC tradition, with anticipative queues snaking around its private booth for each 15-minute showing. This year proved no different, with version three of the Unreal engine truly startling. Combining every rendering technique from normal maps through displacement maps, high dynamic range lighting, soft shadowing, numerous pixel-shader effects, procedurally generated textures as well as a dynamic tessellation engine for outdoor scenes, it raised the technical bar for firstperson shooters. However, this process hasn't been without cost. Epic has had to totally restructure its art pipeline to support such an advanced engine, reworking over six months of art assets in the process. Even now, the capacity of the engine to handle one million polygons per frame means the artists have to author around 200 million polygons of source art. Unsurprisingly, there was no mention of when Epic, or its sister developer Scion, would be actually shipping a game using the technology.

Getting serious

Replacing the previous years' Academic Summit, GDC04 saw the inaugural Serious Games Summit. This two-day event covered the use of games and game technology in fields as diverse as learning, corporate training, strategic thinking, museum navigation and the military.

The biggest success story, of course, is *America's Army*, a free PC game designed to help US army recruitment. Speakers included **Colonel Casey Wardynski**, the project's overall leader, and Michael Zyda of



the Naval Postgraduate School's MOVES Institute, who is also *America's Army*'s development director. Despite the 400Mb download, the game has generated over three million registered users and 60 million hours of online gameplay on 1,200 servers. "And it's only cost us half a percent of the recruitment budget," Wardynski revealed.

As organisers were keen to point out, there are other non-military opportunities in the field. Examples include *Incident Commander*, an emergency training product for the US Department of Justice, while *BioHazard* is aimed at training firefighters how to deal with chemical spills. Corporations are getting in on the act, too, with Nokia commissioning a game to address sexual harassment in the workplace, and PricewaterhouseCooper's *Insider* being used to train staff about derivative trading. Both of these games cost over $1million to develop. More prosaically, Sweden's Interactive Institute, a public research centre, is working with the Royal Shakespeare Company on a game based on The Tempest. Yet, despite its potential, the Serious Games market remains small and fragmented.

Business matters

Demonstrating the range of thinking available at GDC, a more commercially oriented approach was on display during the International Game Developers Association's two-day business summit. It was kicked off by **Ray Muzyka**, Bioware's joint CEO, who set the scene with a rousing state of the union address. "The game business is maturing fast, so developers need to concentrate on skills that will increase their stake in the value chain. The question is do you go big or do you go home?" he argued. "At Bioware, the three key issues we focus on are becoming a specialist developer in the RPG field, building communities for our players, and ensuring the quality of our games is as high as we can make them."

A publisher-eyed view on how to succeed came from EA's chief creative officer, **Bing Gordon**. Resplendent in a surfer-dude skull T-shirt, the company veteran took no prisoners, telling the assembled crowd that if a game was great, then it would sell: "If your game didn't sell, you weren't creative enough," he baldly stated.

The biggest problem most game developers have, Gordon reckons, is that they can't tell marketing people what their game is about. "A third of games pose problems for marketing because no one is sure how to deal with them," he claimed. One related stark warning was his rule of thumb that hitting your release date increases sales by 30 per cent. Conversely, the percentage of sales lost through slippage was left unsaid, although Gordon did claim: "When a gamer says, 'I'll buy your game later,' it actually means 'never'."

Yet he was keen to stress the importance companies should place on their development staff. "Quality is what drives sales," he explained, saying that in his experience, a five per cent improvement in quality can pay off with a 50 to 100 per cent increase in sales.

"EA's first number one game was *Chuck Yeager Flight Trainer*," he recalled. The reason? "We spent a single day at the end of development improving the graphics in the trail cam and added Chuck's taunts when the player failed a mission."

And it will be with such thoughts of mutual co-operation that the Games Developers Conference will reconvene in 2005. One big change, however, will be its location. After several years at San Jose, next year sees the show move 50 miles north to the more salubrious setting of San Francisco. This is a somewhat controversial shift – which has been dictated by financial considerations – and it will be interesting to see how much of the friendly small-town atmosphere the San Jose event generates is lost. Longtime attendees will almost certainly miss the congenial nature of the Fairmont hotel bar, where much of the aftershow gossip and business took place. More convenient for attendees, a San Franciscan GDC may yet prove to be a less satisfying social occasion.



Now a staple of game shows, Sony's EyeToy proved its continuing popularity. The initial *Play* release has sold 700,000 units in the US, with *Groove* due for release stateside in the summer

From the east

One area the GDC organisers have been steadily expanding is the quality of Japanese speakers. Aided by simultaneous translation facilities, 2004 saw the presence of key developers including *Pac-Man* creator **Toru Iwatani**, *Ico* designers **Kenji Kaido** and **Fumito Ueda**, *Rez* creator Tetsuya Mizuguchi and *Legend Of Zelda* producer **Eiji Aonuma**.

With the Japanese game market continuing its decline – sales peaked in 1997 and have dropped by a third since – Iwatani-san bemoaned the lack of creativity. "The industry will continue to shrink unless we start to see new and innovative games," he said, although he hoped that the market would recover in a couple years.

In contrast, Kaido-san and Ueda-san spoke about the rigorous design process behind *Ico*. This involved removing everything that didn't enhance the emotional impact of the game, a process they called their 'minus design philosophy'. The level of detail even covered the quality of animation of the characters' hands, which at a late stage of development Ueda-san demanded be reworked.

Aonuma-san didn't give much away in his talk about the evolution of the *Legend Of Zelda* franchise, but cutting a swathe through the history of the various games, the iron hand of creator Shigeru Miyamoto was clearly apparent.

"There is a process I call The Miyamoto Test, or upending the tea table," Aonuma-san revealed. "Whenever a game nears completion, without fail Mr Miyamoto upends our tea table, and the direction we thought we were going in suddenly changes dramatically. But Mr Miyamoto doesn't just upend the tea table and send the team into utter confusion. He then sits down with us and together we rethink what we have done. So in Mr Miyamoto's case, even if he upends the tea table, he always picks up his own plate."

Advergaming: a lifeline for developers?

A new game-focused agency aims to bolster development revenue through in-game branding and product placement

TV advertising is in crisis. The rise of hard drive TV recorders (or PVRs) such as Sky+ and TiVo means that viewers can banish ad breaks from their lives forever. The public at large is becoming more suspicious of (and desensitised to) traditional forms of advertising. But don't shed any tears for the advertising industry just yet. Commercials aren't going to disappear from our lives any quicker than companies are going to stop chasing custom. Instead, advertising will take on more subliminal forms and reach you through different media – such as games.

If 'I'm A Celebrity…' can be sponsored by a travel agent, how long before the latest FPS is brought to you courtesy of a breakfast cereal?

Brands are already having more joy by associating themselves with specific TV programmes targeted at specific demographics than they are with traditional catch-all commercials. If 'I'm A Celebrity…' can be sponsored by a travel agent or 'Big Brother' by a mobile phone company, how long before the latest FPS is brought to you courtesy of a breakfast cereal? In fact, it's already happening. EA's corporate website actively courts this kind of association, coining the unsavoury term 'advergaming'.

Brands are levering themselves into game worlds, with the appearance of carefully chosen advertising hoardings in sports games, shop fronts in realistic adventure games and clothing brands in skateboard sims. On the one hand, the publishers make a claim for enhanced realism; on the other, gamers are subjected to intrusive, unwanted advertising.

From a gamer's point of view, 'advergaming' is nothing to cheer. From the game industry's perspective, it's a much-needed stream of new revenue, with vast potential. Advertising is the biggest source of funding for the television industry, so why shouldn't games get a slice of the pie? That's the argument of new Bristol-based agency Hive, whose remit is to act as matchmaker between consumer brands and game developers. It would be easy to imagine Hive as a group of London ad industry types with dollar signs in their eyes. Actually, three of the company's four founders have backgrounds in the game industry, and claim Hive exists primarily to aid independent British developers.

"By getting brands into games, it introduces a new revenue stream for developers, and in the long term helps more interesting product get to market," says Hive CEO **Ed Bartlett**, formerly of The Bitmap Brothers. To date, Hive has worked with Rebellion and Team 17 on branding deals with Red Bull, and is approaching developers directly in preference to publishers. "We all come from a game development background and have experienced the problems of getting a project off the ground. Associating consumer brands with games in the early stages can provide a solid financial proposal for developers to pitch to publishers."



Hive Partners (from left): managing director Graham Davies, communications director Rachel Norman, CEO Ed Bartlett and CTO Si Donvaband hard at work in the Hive offices

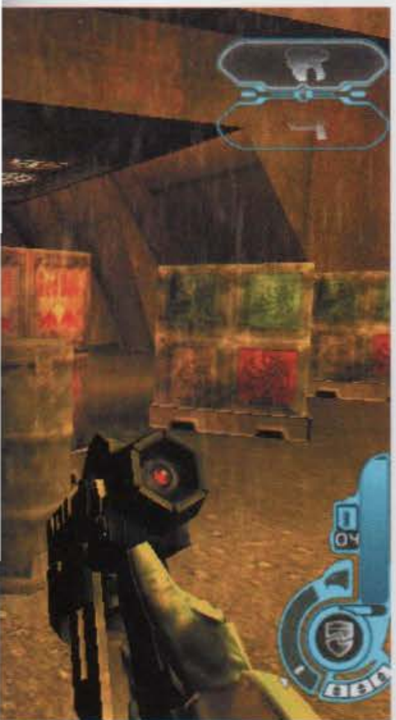
MD **Graham Davies** was an executive producer at Psygnosis when the developer struck a deal with Diesel to plaster the clothing brand's logo across billboards in the futuristic cityscapes of *G-Police*. He explains how the demands of advertisers have moved on, seeking something beyond 'static' branding – at the same time, game technology has progressed to a stage where it can accommodate demands for more interactive involvement. "We're calling this 'situation branding' – the player can interact with the brand or product in a believable way that actually benefits the game," he says.



The Red Bull brand appears in *Worms 3D* and *Dredd Vs Death* not just as a billboard as or a poster, but as a revitalising power-up. The game characters are seen quaffing a can of the drink with a resultant energy boost, reinforcing the consumer's association with Red Bull's advertised effects. Hive suggests this kind of branding doesn't jar with the player because the connection between Red Bull and energy boosts is already made in the real world.

It's difficult to think of too many other examples where 'situation branding' would work in games without major contrivance, but Hive claims it already has several other partnerships ready to announce. Meanwhile, another aspect of its business will involve offering brand overhaul services to videogame companies. "If consumer brands want to associate themselves with gaming brands, then the gaming brands have to be appealing," says Bartlett.

Communications director **Rachel Norman**, a former ad agency account manager, continues: "Branding is perceived as overly complex, expensive and corporate, but it can actually be very straightforward. There are simple things that a company can put in place to help it



shout louder in a noisy marketplace. The games industry has grown so rapidly that a lot of companies haven't had a chance to think about who they are and what they stand for. A brand isn't just a logo, although most game company logos are shocking."

"Brands work," confirms Davies. "A brand comes with a promise that engenders trust in the consumer. Games companies can have that too, if they are prepared to invest."

All this talk of brands will make any right-thinking gamer bristle. Can 'advergaming' be anything other than disruptive to the experience of play? "Product placement contributes nothing to credibility and validity of the medium [of videogames]," says **W Eric Martin** of www.badads.org, an anti-advertising campaign site. Yet Hive genuinely believes it can add value to a gamer's experience while benefiting the brand involved and underwriting a developer's fund for new projects. "We're not out to ruin videogames, we want to make them better," says Bartlett. "Product placement will happen," reasons Davies. "We're here to make sure it's done sympathetically."





Hive's first job was to place Red Bull branded power-ups in *Judge Dredd: Dredd Vs Death* and *Worms 3D*. Rebellion and Team 17 benefitted financially

Gametrak comes with strings attached

In2Games' ingenious new PS2 peripheral has the potential to rival EyeToy when it comes to physically interacting with console games



Gametrak's retractable cords will measure depth and direction. The footpad acts as a 'start' button

We're understandably nervous about console peripherals. It's rare that a steering wheel or an Airpad, let alone a 'cyber helmet' or a 'power glove', will come along to persuade us that there's a better way to enjoy games than with a standard controller. EyeToy has altered that, proving that an element of physical interaction can open up new experiences without serving to frustrate gamers or (perhaps importantly) make them look stupid.

Gametrak initially sounds like it could be a credibility-crushing Heath Robinson contraption – a pair of gloves or a stick attached to two retractable cords – but it's actually surprisingly discreet and effective. Four years in the making from former Gamester peripheral designer In2Games, Gametrak is a mechanical solution to recreating a physical 3D gaming environment on-screen. EyeToy cannot accurately recognise depth of field, but Gametrak tracks your movements in all six directions and then applies them to the actions of an on-screen character.

It operates like a joystick for left/right and forward/back movement but adds the up/down dimension by dint of its spring-loaded strings. Initially, Gametrak's technology is being applied to the beat 'em up genre courtesy of *Dark Wind*, a collaboration with ex-Iguana outfit Atomic Planet. The screen is viewed from a firstperson perspective, with only a representation of your arms visible on-screen in a similar manner to Namco's recent Xbox experiment *Breakdown*. With a pair of gloves attached to Gametrak's cords, every movement of your arms, in terms of both positioning and speed (and therefore force), is recreated in realtime. It's complex to explain, but tangible and satisfying in practice, your on-screen opponent suffering thumping blows to the head as you shadowbox the air in front of the screen.

With a pair of gloves attached to Gametrak's cords every movement of your arms, in terms of both positioning and speed, is recreated

The game registers attacks from all angles and variety is provided by blocks, combos and spellcasting (drawing a shape in the air). Calibration isn't perfect as yet, but In2Games director Harry Holmwood claims that ultimately Gametrak will operate with positional accuracy to the nearest millimetre and speed to a split second.



Dark Wind will be the first Gametrak-compatible game to hit the stores

The second game in development is equally intriguing. *Real World Golf* is under construction at Gusto (formerly Silicon Dreams) and it applies the dynamics of your physical golf swing directly into a *Tiger Woods*-style game. The model is simplified, but the way the game registers the speed and direction of your swing is impressive.

Holmwood intends to extend the Real World Sports brand to basketball (already in development), baseball and tennis, and a tech demo of the Gametrak being used to represent the movement of a sword has elicited the interest of a major developer. There are plans afoot to use the technology to power such varied game genres as dance titles and god sims. Following a successful showing at GDC, Gametrak is hot property at the moment, and it's up to *Dark Wind*, due to be self-published by In2Games in August, to prove that it can transcend novelty status and offer up fresh gameplay possibilities.





Gametrak golf provides a surprisingly effective 'shadow' of your swing. Basketball and baseball are set to follow

EIGF Edge Award nominations emerge

Ten wildly different games on various formats are in the running for our prestigious Edinburgh gong

Last August, the first Edinburgh International Games Festival added videogames to the whirl of music, comedy, theatre, art, dance, books, film, television and fireworks that engulfs the world's most beautiful city once a year. For 2004, the event is considerably expanded, and we are delighted to announce the evolution of the Award for Innovation and Excellence, won last year by *Metroid Prime*.

Reflecting the aims of the EIGF, the **Edge** Award is not simply a prize for the most warmly received or best-selling game of the year. Instead, it aims to reward titles which expand players' expectations of what games are capable of – whether it's by doing something traditional with absolute excellence, or breaking promising new ground. The judging panel will be drawn from around the world, and across the gaming industry, including prominent developers, academics and journalists.

However, an important part of the EIGF is getting gamers – and curious non-gamers – involved, and the **Edge** Award will reflect this. The nominated games will be available for the public to play at the Go Play Games event (subject to age restrictions) and festival-goers and **Edge** readers will be able to vote for their favoured game on the shortlist. The winner will receive the **Edge** People's Choice Award. Details of how to vote will appear in future issues of **Edge**.

Selecting the shortlist was a heated, lengthy and thoroughly enjoyable process, and many fine games were pencilled in and out of the final ten. As it stands, the list recognises innovations in online game design, new dynamics in group play, graphical excellence ranging from wild idiosyncrasies to real-word precision, new hardware technologies (EyeToy was released a smidgeon too late for last year's award), titles which re-invent how we interact with videogames and others which redefine how games can handle more challenging content. The judges will have their work cut out for them.

EIGF04 facts

The main industry conference takes place on August 12 and 13, and will feature sessions on subjects as diverse as virtual economies and the future of peripherals. Those interested in registering as delegates can do so through the EIGF website. The Go Play Games event (August 8-22) is opening to the public and will feature a wide range of playable games. Game screenings (August 11-14) are also open to the public, and will include a onedotzero presentation on the 'culture of fear' in videogames, analysing the evolution of fear and paranoia. Neil Young, recently appointed general manager at Maxis, will talk about *The Sims 2*, and Ian Livingstone will present a guide to creating gaming icons, from Lara to Agent 47. Check the EIGF website for prices, admission guidelines and to register for updates. For more details, point your browser to http://www.eigf.co.uk/

Edge Award nominees:



Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow
GC, PC, PS2, Xbox



Wario Ware, Inc
Game Boy Advance



Viewtiful Joe
GameCube



EyeToy: Play
PlayStation2



Project Gotham Racing 2
Xbox



Prince Of Persia: TSOT
GC, PC, PS2, Xbox



Katamari Damacy
PlayStation 2



Manhunt
PC, PS2, Xbox



Four Swords+
GameCube plus GBA



In Memoriam
PC, Mac

CUTTINGS



Smiths leave Ion Storm

Both Harvey Smith, lead designer of *Deus Ex: Invisible War*, and Randy Smith (above), project director on *Thief: Deadly Shadows*, left Warren Spector's Austin studio in the first week of April. The former plans to start his own studio, and has claimed his departure is amicable; the latter's plans are unknown, but a statement from Spector refers to 'internal friction and unresolvable conflicts' in *Deadly Shadows*' final development phase. Neither Eidos nor Ion Storm have indicated that the game's May ship date will been affected by either Smith's departure, which has been taken as an ominous sign among the *Thief* fan community.

More Famicom Minis

The original Famicom Mini series for the GBA sold nearly a million copies, so Nintendo has decided to add ten more. New publishers have been added to the roster, with the likes of Konami and Capcom joining Namco, Hudson and Nintendo. The games will also come in their original packaging and are going on sale in Japan during May at around ¥2,000 (£10). Here's the list:

Vol 11: *Mario Bros* (Nintendo, 1983)
Vol 12: *Clu Clu Land* (Nintendo, 1984)
Vol 13: *Balloon Fight* (Nintendo, 1984)
Vol 14: *Wrecking Crew* (Nintendo, 1985)
Vol 15: *Dr Mario* (Nintendo, 1990)
Vol 16: *Dig Dug* (Namco, 1982)
Vol 17: *Adventure Island* (Hudson, 1986);
Vol 18: *Ghosts 'n' Goblins* (Capcom, 1985)
Vol 19: *Twin Bee* (Konami, 1986)
Vol 20: *Ganbare Goemon! Karakuri Dochu* (Konami, 1986)



Game Stars returns to build momentum

Another primetime Saturday afternoon slot sees gaming gain more recognition on terrestrial TV as ambitious live event gathers pace

Photography: **Martin Thompson**

Stars of the show

The Sun People's Choice Award: *EyeToy: Play*
The Game Most Wanted Award: *Driver 3*
Best Adventure Game: *The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker*
Best Pocket Game: *Pokemon Ruby/Sapphire*
Best Spin-Off: *Knights Of The Old Republic*
Best Sports Game: *Championship Manager*
Best Newcomer: *EyeToy: Play*
Best Action Game: *James Bond 007: Everything Or Nothing.*
Best Racing Game: *Need For Speed: Underground*
Best Multiplayer Game: *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!*

Game Stars made a return to ITV over the Easter weekend for its second annual awards show. Filmed in front of an audience of industry luminaries, the event was a success, albeit in terms that many gamers may find hard to accept. Not so the programme makers: "We believe it was a triumph overall, building considerably on the fine work during year one," commented producer **Catherine Whelton**. "We placed a greater emphasis on the guests, with some real head-turners, and the music acts really enhanced what we were trying to achieve – marrying mainstream culture with gaming. We were conscious of reflecting the image of gamers in a positive way, and worked hard to show them playing in a natural environment."

The night also saw the title of UK's Greatest Gamer awarded to 16-year-old Thomas Kingston. Kingston, last year's runner-up, beat the gracious Michelle Homewood for the prize of a trip to the Tokyo Game Show. "The hunt for the UK's greatest gamer final was exciting TV and we were really happy with the format and presentation of the competition, which managed to capture the drama of competitive gaming in a way more familiar to a mainstream audience," explained Whelton. "The feedback we've had so far has been overwhelmingly positive, and we're looking forward to developing Game Stars even further."



Speeches from award winners were left on the cutting room floor, but as gongs were generally collected by publishing CEOs and marketing managers, they wouldn't have made for great TV

"The feedback we've had so far has been overwhelmingly positive, and we're looking forward to developing Game Stars even further"



The Game Stars audience was entertained by performances from the likes of Ash, while Iain Lee and Holly Willoughby (right) presented the shebang. Lee's knowing patter was a clear highlight

Presenters Iain Lee and Holly Willoughby proved excellent hosts throughout the evening. Willoughby's role was limited to being an adequately attractive comic foil, but Lee's videogame nous shone through, the dedicated gamer treading the fine line between amusing presenter and local-geek-come-good. Stand-out moments of the night for us were Simon Pegg's shout to Capcom for the 'Shaun Of The Dead' inspiration, and John Thompson's assuredly genuine affection for videogames. It is celebrities like these who provide public validation for adults seeking solace in electronic entertainment. Jordan, James Hewitt and Gary Lucy's presence was driven by a more publicity-hungry aspect; their appearances were less likely to sit comfortably with some members of the videogaming community.

Edge readers may also find it very difficult to take seriously a show which salutes *Need For Speed Underground* as a better experience than *F-Zero GX* or *Project Gotham*. In truth, who won the actual awards is weirdly irrelevant: a prime-time brand is being built, and will continue to be constructed with Game Stars Live in September. While (superficially, at least) it doesn't serve the same sector of the industry as this magazine, it is absolutely necessary if videogaming's appeal is to continue to grow.







Nintendo to lead way at E3

This year's LA expo offers up promising new titles from Nintendo, Konami, Capcom, Sega, id, Rockstar, Bioware, Pandemic and more

The 2004 Electronic Entertainment Expo in Los Angeles is imminent at the time of writing, so we'll be able to bring you an exhaustive show report next month (with an **Edge** E3 Experience 2004 DVD documentary to follow with **E**139). However, many publishers divulged details of their E3 wares to us in advance, allowing us to give you an upfront impression of this year's show highlights. Obviously Sega's *OutRun 2* (Xbox), Ubisoft's *Prince Of Persia 2*, Capcom's *Viewtiful Joe 2* and *The Bard's Tale* from Acclaim will be on display for the scrutiny of the world's media, having debuted in this month's **Edge**. Additionally, there will be a rash of new titles to intrigue showgoers.



Metroid Prime 2: Echoes is among the big games expected to be shown at E3

GameCube's line-up is strong, with *Metroid Prime 2: Echoes* (see page 46 for more) and a new *Zelda* title leading the charge. Capcom is due to unveil *Devil May Cry 3* at its pre-E3 Editor's Day – the company has brought in a fresh name to work on the sequel, which is good news after the disappointing second game. Konami's big new announcement – bar the annually anticipated *Metal Gear Solid trailer* – is an arcade racer entitled *Enthusia*, the work of ex-*Ridge Racer* coders at Konami TYO. Sega will be showing six new games at the show, mostly believed to be acquisitions rather than games developed in-house, although we look forward to playing the EyeToy-powered novelty *Sega Superstars*.

Doom 3 for Xbox, complete with Live co-op and deathmatch modes, will be playable on the show floor, although it's unlikely that Valve will confess to a similar *Half-Life 2* conversion.

An E3 outing for *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* has been virtually ruled out, but Rockstar will unveil its game of cult gang movie 'The Warriors'. EA's ambitious new licensed RPG *The Lord Of The Rings: The Third Age*, spanning the entire book/movie trilogy, will go head to head with *Knights Of The Old Republic: The Sith Lords*. In addition to the promising *Mercenaries* for Lucas, developer Pandemic will show off a new PS2 title, *Destroy All Humans!*

This could all be overshadowed by official showings for PSP and NDS, although it's not yet known whether Sony or Nintendo will be showing playable prototypes of relevant software. Whatever the case, this year's event may be seen as Battle Of The Handhelds.

CUTTINGS

New studio from Ex-Bungie head

Bungie co-founder Alex Seropian has founded a new Chicago-based studio, Widelcad Games. Previously a designer on Bungie's most acclaimed titles – *Marathon*, *Myth* and *Halo* – Seropian intends to implement a 'new kind of production model' using Wideload's in-house team (currently some ten ex-Bungie staffers) to create and prototype titles, which are then passed to external, independent teams for supervised development.

The studio's first title is mooted to be a 'wildly innovative' PC/Xbox title, utilising the *Halo* engine.

Half-Life hardcore surprise Bungie

With almost a million responses to its *Half-Life 2* hardware survey, Valve has been taken by surprise at the fervour of its audience's dedication to new PC technology. Orchestrated via Steam, Valve's new content distribution technology, respondents were naturally skewed towards the committed. Nevertheless, the developer was amazed by the level of response, and intrigued to discover that only 20 per cent of its players had failed to upgrade to Windows XP, 69 per cent enjoyed processor speeds of above 1.5Ghz and as many as 23 per cent boasted 1Mbps connection speeds. "It was a great response, and we were pleasantly surprised by the statistics," says Valve's **Erik Johnson**. "The whole development team has studied the results intently. It's really valuable data for us." View the survey results for yourself at www.steampowered.com – and upgrade your PC accordingly in anticipation of *Half-Life 2*.

Recently reviewed

A rundown of last issue's review scores

Title	Platform	Publisher	Developer	Score
Transformers	PS2	Atari	Melbourne House	8
Legend Of Zelda: Four Swords+	GC	Nintendo	Capcom	9
Unreal Tournament 2004	PC	Atari	Epic/Digital	8
Breed	PC	CDV	Brat Studios	3
World War Zero	PS2	MC2	Rebellion	6
TOCA Race Driver 2	Xbox, PC	Codemasters	In-house	8
Phantasy Star Online III: C.A.R.D Revolution	GC	Sega	Sonic Team	6
Katamari Damacy	PS2	Namco	In-house	8
Astro Boy	PS2	Sega	Sonic Team	5
Lifeline	PS2	Konami	SCEI	4
Dead Man's Hand	Xbox	Atari	Human Head Studios	3
Fight Night 2004	GC, PS2, Xbox	EA	EA Sports	7
Glass Rose	PS2	Capcom	In-house	3
Savage: The Battle For Newerth	PC	Digital Jesters	S2 Games	6
Fallout: Brotherhood Of Steel	PS2, Xbox	Interplay	Black Isle Studios	3
Pool Paradise	GC, PC, PS2, Xbox	Ignition	Awesome Studios	8
Psyvariar 2: The Will To Fabricate	DC, PS2	Skonec	Success	7
Gungrave OD	PS2	Sega/Red Entertainment	Ikusabune/Red Entertainment	4



Four Swords+



Transformers



Katamari Damacy



Breed

www.gamespy.com/gamermetrics

Great expectations

IGN/GameSpy's GamerMetrics consumer intelligence tool is designed to provide a snapshot of the gamer's psyche

It doesn't sound particularly exciting, but data mining is a fundamental weapon in the armoury of commerce. People leave streams of information wherever they go, from tube egress points stored on their Oyster cards to the weekly shopping tucked away on their loyalty card. Crunched into a usable form and then mined for interesting relationships, this provides companies with a competitive edge. How else, for example, would supermarkets have worked out placing beer next to nappies would be a lucrative combination? (The answer is that new fathers, popping out for emergency Pampers, can't resist the lure of Stella, by the way.)

It's unlikely IGN/GameSpy's new GamerMetrics will unearth anything quite as unlikely, but who knows: maybe a clique of hard talking *Counter-Strike* fans with a penchant for Japanese dating sims exists somewhere. And if it does, GamerMetrics should turn it up.

Generated via two separate datastreams from traffic culled across the websites run by IGN/GameSpy, this consumer intelligence tool is designed to provided publishers and retailers with insights about the interest being shown in specific game title. The passive monitoring occurs using data pulled from standard audience logs and from random surveys run across the group's websites. The active component is provided from information submitted by a panel of subscribers, however.

Currently numbering around 240,000 IGN users, not only does this cover what hardware people own and which games they are looking forward to, but also correlates it with more general information such as age and socio-economic grouping. Through these data feeds, GamerMetrics tracks the status of around 23,000 games.

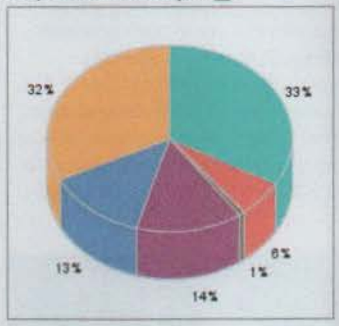
Still in its beta stage, the product will be launched in June, with annual five-seat subscriptions starting at $24,000. **David Tokheim**, IGN/GameSpy's senior director of customer intelligence, reckons GamerMetrics will provide great value for money.

"Having access to relevant data that provides insights on issues such as success in defined market segments and return on investment on marketing is already changing the way publishers and retailers understand the value of their online work," he claims. As for fears IGN/Gamespy will face a backlash from users concerned they are being exploited, Tokheim is unconvinced. "More than one per cent of our panel users update their information on a daily basis," he says. "If anything, I think we're giving users a chance for their voice to be better heard by the industry."

Top Affinity Games

1. DOOM 3
2. StarCraft: Ghost
3. Perfect Dark Zero
4. Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow
5. Fable

Competitive Landscape



Halo 2 230,640
Fable 95,428
DOOM 3 101,729
Perfect Dark Zero 4,918
StarCraft: Ghost 45,676
Tom Clancy's Splinter ... 237,428

Polling specific data from over 240,000 gamers, GamerMetrics will provide publishers with a snapshot of exactly which games are most anticipated, enabling them to focus their marketing and PR activities. The result should mean that users' interests are better served

With subscriptions starting at $24,000, the information GamerMetrics generates won't be cheap, but IGN/GameSpy thinks, used in the correct way, it will prove priceless for publishers and retailers

Upcoming Releases

Game Title	Platform	Publisher	Release
Midnight Nowhere	PC	Buka Entertainment	03/22/2004
Pokemon Colosseum	GCN	Nintendo	03/22/2004
Syberia II	PC	XS Games	03/22/2004
All-Star Baseball 2005	Xbox	Acclaim	03/23/2004
Backyard Baseball	PS2	Infogrames	03/23/2004
Breed	PC	CDV	03/23/2004
CSI: Dark Motives	PC	Ubisoft	03/23/2004
Carmen Sandiego: The Secret of the Stolen Drums	GCN	BAM! Entertainment	03/23/2004
Counter-Strike: Condition Zero	PC	Vivendi Universal	03/23/2004
Cy Girls	PS2	Konami	03/23/2004
Desert Rats vs. Afrika Korps	PC	Monte Cristo	03/23/2004

Most Active Games 02/21/2004 to 03/21/2004 REFRESH DATA

Game Title	Platform	Publisher	Avg. Daily Gamers	Unique Interest	Release
Ninja Gaiden	Xbox	Tecmo	21,457	1,797	03/02/2004
Metal Gear Solid:...	GCN	Konami	11,368	1,189	03/09/2004
✓ Grand Theft Auto:...	PS2	Rockstar Games	9,613	1,233	10/19/2004
✓ Resident Evil 4	GCN	Capcom	9,011	789	11/16/2004
Tom Clancy's Spli...	Xbox	Ubisoft	7,862	702	03/23/2004
Unreal Tournament...	PC	Atari	7,719	607	03/16/2004
✓ Halo 2	Xbox	Microsoft	7,550	1,017	08/31/2004
World of Warcraft	PC	Blizzard	6,979	240	12/31/2004
MVP Baseball 2004	PS2	Electronic Arts	6,707	327	03/09/2004
Metal Gear Solid ...	PS2	Konami	6,427	531	11/01/2004
MVP Baseball 2004	Xbox	Electronic Arts	6,150	274	03/09/2004

Range (last): 7d | 14d | 30d | 60d | 90d

Adding up the numbers

A similar approach to GamerMetrics, although focused on the analysis of in-game advertising, has been launched by Activision and market information company Nielsen. The initiative will allow game companies to supply advertisers with accurate audience measurement figures to help them assess the impact of in-game advert exposure.

"The game industry is one of the fastest growing entertainment businesses, and will soon be as mainstream an advertising medium as television," says **Bobby Kotick**, Activision's CEO. "Given the tremendous popularity of the medium, we wanted to take a leadership position in generating a standardised method to measure advertising metrics in games."

www.alias.com/maya

Gunning for next gen

The latest version of Alias's 3D animation and modelling software, Maya, will provide developers with the firepower required for PlayStation3 and Xbox2

It says much about the buying power of game studios that Maya 6 is a game-focused release. "The fact our top three Maya Complete customers are all games companies makes a big difference in terms of the amount of attention games got during Maya 6's development," reveals **Geoff Foulds**, Alias's games marketing manager. "Around two-thirds of the features are targeted towards game production."

And in addition to the dedicated game-programming unit within Maya's engineering team, Maya 6 also benefited from input provided by key clients on what Foulds calls the games advisory council. "We've probably had more customer input to Maya 6 than any other release," he says.

Considering the timing with respect to the console cycle, a large part of this effort has been taken up with ensuring Maya 6 can handle the challenges of the new wave of hardware. "The big challenge for developers in the future will be the need to author and handle massive amounts of much higher quality content," Foulds explains.

"That's why we've focused on making sure Maya offers scalability at a low level, as well as extensibility within its higher level tools."

Examples include a new set of scene-management tools such as a file referencing system and shader organisation features. There's also been a push to ensure Maya can be more easily integrated within existing art pipelines. Through extensions to its application programming interface and MEL scripting language, thirdparty tools developers will now get more access to Maya's low-level features.

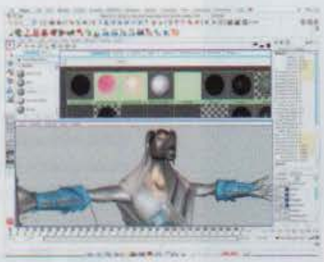
Similarly, the link between Maya and industry-standard texture creation package Photoshop has been tightened. Photoshop files can be both read into Maya and written out from Maya, with automatically created connections to Photoshop's layer sets facilitating an iterative workflow.

The other big improvement in Maya 6 has been its TRAX non-linear animation tool. This has been rewritten to ensure animators can reuse existing clips as well as mixing in new animations, whether motion capture or keyframed data. A key tool in this area is the retargeting system, which can take motion from one type of character skeleton and automatically apply it to one with different dimensions or even bone structure.

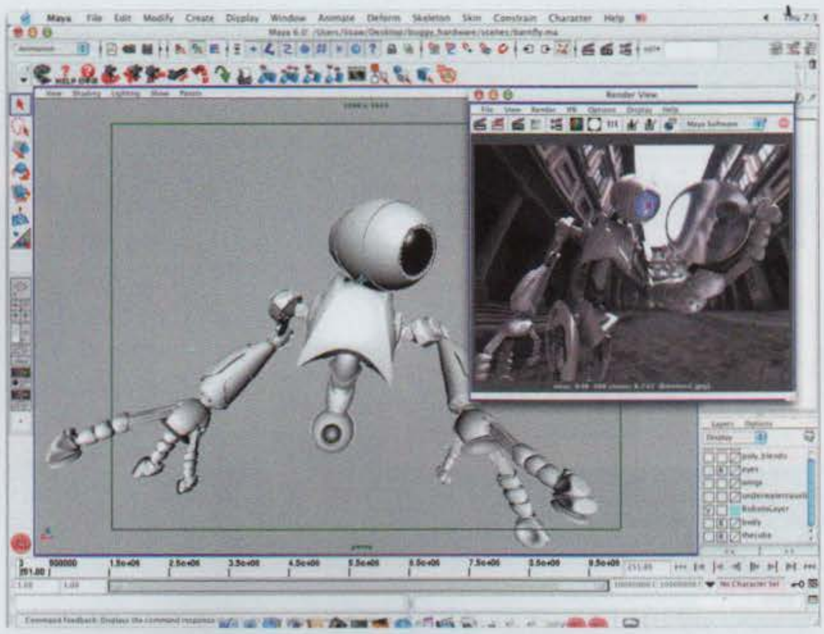
The rest of the release is completed by more minor changes. General performance, particularly for Mac OS X users, has been boosted. The soft modification tool makes a neat addition to polygon modelling functionality, while support for platform-specific file formats, DDS for DirectX and PNG for PlayStation2, has been added.

Still, it will be with its future progeny that Alias hopes Maya 6 will really shine.

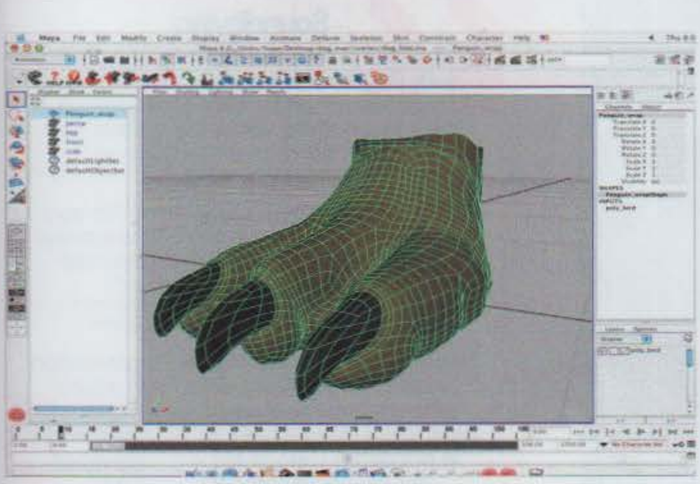
One area of futureproofing with respect to expected increases in the quality of next-generation art assets is the way Maya 6 handles shaders







Improvements to workflow mean that Maya users can get more done without loading up other packages



Around two thirds of the new features in Maya 6 are targeted towards improving game development, with support for new technology as well as animation tools and textures

Corporate movement

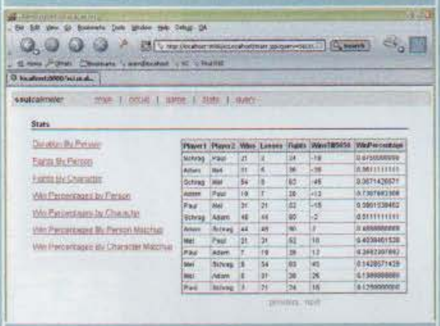
It's not just Maya 6 that's been getting Alias into the headlines recently. Currently owned by troubled graphics hardware specialist Silicon Graphics, Alias has announced plans to buy itself out. The $57.7 million required will be provided by private equity firm Accel-KKR, which will take a majority stake. The deal is schedule to be completed in the next couple of months. It was back in 1995 that Silicon Graphics bought the (then separate) companies, Alias Research and Wavefront Technologies, financing the deal with around $500 million in new shares. Trading as Alias|Wavefront for eight years, the company was renamed Alias in 2003.



The soft modification tool allows users to move and scale objects using curve-based falloff parametrics

OUT THERE

REPORTAGE



Statistics, it is claimed, can be made to prove anything. These just show how good you are at *Soul Calibur*

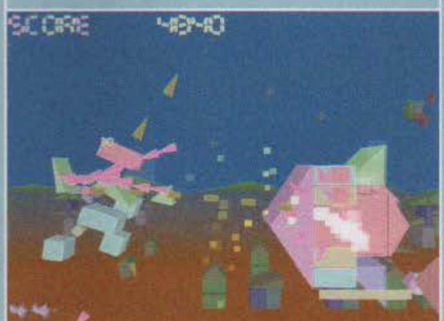






The simple looks and low polygon count mask a game of enormous complexity that's very, very fast indeed





Parts of enemy ships can be stuck to your own, and will attack enemies. Sticking to things increases your score

01 Stats never lie

US: Comprehensive stat-tracking should be a standard feature of all games – simple to add, simple to use, simple to gloat. The Soul Calimeter corrects Namco's irritating omission by using a PC and a video capture card to track *Soul Calibur* statistics, recording win-loss data for a rota of players and finally putting paid to all those 'you only ever win when you're playing as Kilik' arguments. The program also watches changes in health bars during the fight, and provides appropriate in-game audio commentary. It can recognise when a player's mounting a comeback, or when someone's close to a perfect, as well as glancing back through its history file and pointing out that, yes, player two only ever wins when they're playing as Kilik. It's a brilliant piece of work, a smart-tech solution that we can see swiftly becoming indispensable in intra-office arguments. See more at: homepage.mac.com/mschrag/SoulCalimeter/

02 Block rockin' geek

Japan: *Tumiki Fighters* is a new shooter from Kenta Cho, aka ABA Games. ABA Games' previous works have featured in Out There before, most notably *Noiz2*, the bullet-dodge to end all bullet dodges. Well, we say that, but clearly it hasn't *actually* ended anything, because Kenta's new work is as ludicrously paced as the last. What warrants its inclusion here is the Sticky system, which allows dextrous players to attach bits of downed enemy ships to their own craft. Given that the whole game is constructed with a simple pastel Sticklebrick-style aesthetic, pretty soon everything starts looking like a hazardous intergalactic playroom. Download *Tumiki Fighters* from www.asahi-net.or.jp/~cs8k-cyu/windows/tf_e.html

Soundbytes

"My team enjoys the difficulty of working with PlayStation2, and we assume that PlayStation3 will be even more difficult. We know nothing about the system; but it's from Sony, so we assume so"
Ken Kutaragi looks forward to continuing his painful relationship with Sony

"Everyone involved is looking at this as a big-budget picture. We see a tremendous opportunity to launch a film franchise with Nintendo as a partner"
Producer Brad Foxhoven looks forward to bringing *Metroid* to the big screen. John Woo has an option to direct

"Nintendo is working on its next-generation system. The abilities of GCNext will be different from what you have seen in the past. What Nintendo is currently discussing is not about state-of-the-art technology for enhancing processing power"
Satoru Iwata talks next-generation Nintendo

03 Kick, punch…

UK: That the best-looking PC game we've seen in some time has come out of Lionhead may come as little surprise. It's not a commercial release, though, but a side-project from one of the studio's artists. Mark Healey's *Rag Doll Kung Fu* was demoed to us during our Lionhead walkabout a couple of months ago, and is an astounding beat 'em up played out through gorgeous kung-fu filters. The control system, though, is what really marks the game out as something different. Up to eight players can take control of a ragdoll fighter with a USB mouse. By clicking and dragging their limbs they send them through the air with creative, balletic, ridiculous/deadly power. You could say Healey's work shows exactly the sort of creativity gaming needs. Failing that, you could say it's really funny. Check Lionhead's website for more.

04 …it's all in the mind

Ireland: Sometimes reviewing videogames for a living can be hard work. Slumped on the couch, holding the joypad, sometimes till as late as seven in the evening – it's a wonder the **Edge** staff look as young and handsome as they do. Look at their hands, though, and you'll see they're worn to the bone, miner's claws, crooked and dusty. So it's with great relief that we hear about *Mind Balance*, the marvellous invention of the MindGames group at University College Dublin. *Mind Balance* charges the player with walking a Scottish monster across a cosmic tightrope using only the power of their mind. Cerebus, a slightly frightening looking 'brain-computer interface', detects which part of the screen the helmet-wearer is looking at, and balances the creature accordingly. We look forward to a mainstream application, and more specifically seeing what our hive mind gets up to in *GTA5*. The results may not be fit for print.

05 Ad aware

US: Videogames aren't all about teaching children to kill. No, they offer unparalleled commercial advertising opportunities to the innovative investor, too, as evidenced by the Yahoo! Autos billboard recently erected in Times Square. The interactive billboard allows two players to race against each other on the massive sponsored sign, providing Scalextric-style fun for shoppers and tourists alike. Admittedly it's not the most sophisticated piece of electronic entertainment we have ever witnessed – players dial a number, and then use the two and eight keys on their phone to make the cars move faster and slower. Still, everything has to start somewhere – *Spacewar*, *Pong*, etc – and we look forward to kicking your ass at *Monkey Ball* in a Dole advert sometime soon.

Data Stream Charts special

Longest-standing PS2 game in top ten: ***FIFA 2004*** **(27 weeks)**
Longest-standing Xbox game in top ten: ***GTA Double Pack*** **(18 weeks)**
Longest-standing GC game in top ten: ***Sonic Adventure DX: Director's Cut*** **(34 weeks)**
Longest-standing PC game in top ten: ***The Sims*** **(82 weeks)**
Longest-standing GBA game in top ten: ***Sonic Advance*** **(74 weeks)**
Number of weeks *Norton Internet Security 2004* has been in the all-formats chart: **29**

03



Mark Healey's *Rag Doll Kung-Fu* has a unique control mechanic that marks it out from other fighting games







If only all game artists spent their free time making stuff this cool. We'll have to start a competition, or something

04



Keeping the monster on the tightrope is just a matter of mind over matter thanks to the *Mind Balance* project



And there we have it – the friendliest-looking peripheral ever devised. Or does it in fact look just totally evil?

05



It's the big screen to end all big screens, and makes even the most enormous home system seem tiny



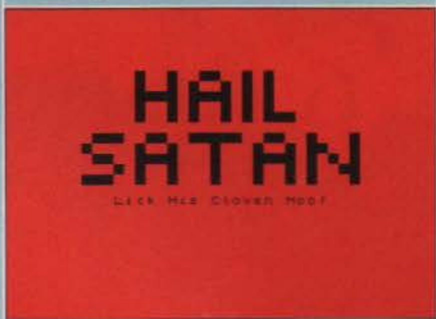
There are many ways to find pleasure in Times Square, although we doubt you've ever considered doing this



Xbox? Now that's a cake. We fear they'll never cut their big wedding confection with that thing, though (right)







It was inevitable, of course, that a band named after an anime series would be fans of the good old Speccy



It's Shaky! Today's equivalent would perhaps be a Timberlake CD single featuring a PS2 dance demo



Heading north apparently instantly kills the Thompson Twins, drowning them in the ocean. What shall we do?



We receive stuff like this every day of the week. Fortunately it didn't require four people to open it...



06 Recipes for success

US: If there's a sure fire way to our collective heart, it's... well, it's by showing us some big robots rampaging across the Tokyo skyline. But if there's a second route to magazine seduction, it's with cake. Of course, buying the right cake is a precise science – it'd be as easy to offend as it would to impress – but now, thanks to top gadget website Gizmodo, we can provide a brief illustrated guide as to the best way of winning our affection with confection. When the magazine gets married, it wants all three of these at the wedding, and tiny Game Boy fairy cakes, too. Head to: www.gizmodo.com/archives/playstation_a_sacred_institution_014778.php

07 Lo-fi/hi-fi

US: The March 9 entry on music weblog Kempa.com – www.kempa.com/blog/archives/000053.html – provides a brief history of Vinyl Data, listing a number of cases where geek-rock musicians have printed electronic data alongside their musical meanderings. It turns out that The Thompson Twins and Shakin' Stevens both published interactive experiences that can be loaded into a Spectrum, and The Stranglers' Aural Sculpture includes a text adventure called Aural Quest where you take the role of their tour manager. Our favourite, though, has to be the brief burst of Spectrum noise at the start of Urusei Yatsura's final, fantastic full-stop, Thank You. Loading the code into a Spectrum calls up a red screen with black text: 'Hail Satan'. All hail indeed.

08 Nintendo's treasure surprise

UK: Sadly, not a reference to the boutique developer. We know you know that Nintendo is good at blowing cash on brilliant, pointless things, so imagine our surprise when we heard that Nintendo Europe's PR firm, Cake, had sent selected journalists a foot-long wooden chest. Inside? Why, a copy of *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles*, of course, along with some straw and a press release. Fantastic, but what can you do with an empty Nintendo treasure chest, aside from burying a Mario figurine in it and leaving alien archaeologists to puzzle over it? Answers on a postcard...

Continue

Super Monkey Ball 2
Still ten times the party game *Mario Party*'ll ever be
Games that could only be games
Katamari Damacy – playing to the medium's strengths, and winning
Gametrak
It shouldn't work – should it?

Quit

The Super Arena 'action' mat
It shouldn't work – and it doesn't, really
Games that try to be airport novels
WWII, Navy SEALs, Tom Clancy. Men with guns can be boring
Me-first-exclusive news frenzies
Some days it'd be nice if the web just went kaput

OUT THERE
MEDIA

09 Protocol

The combination of Galloway, an assistant professor in media ecology at New York University, and MIT's continuing Leonardo series was never going to make for an easy read. Maybe that's a good thing? Protocol, which is subtitled How Control Exists After Decentralisation, certainly covers a lot of ground. At least the starting point is straightforward. Protocol, Galloway argues, is the formal process which encapsulates data while being indifferent to its content. In terms of technology, notably the internet, this is important because it is only protocol which enables the distributive network to prosper. Equally, the only protocol that can survive is one that remains open from governmental and monopolistic force. The internet, with its backbone of underlying open technologies, is the ideal example. So far, so good. What's less clear, however, is how this scales into the wider issues investigated. Fellow academics will probably have most fun with the chapters on form and power, where the works of Marx, Foucault, Baudrillard and Deleuze are brought to bear. The latter's claim that 'technology is social before it is technical' is apt; the point being that inventions can only be of their time. The label 'information age' has less to do with the widespread use of computers than a social acceptance of a social order by metrics such as national insurance number, Galloway suggests. It's thought-provoking, if somewhat inconclusive. That control exists after decentralisation is clear; maybe the question of how to mitigate its effects remains for another book?

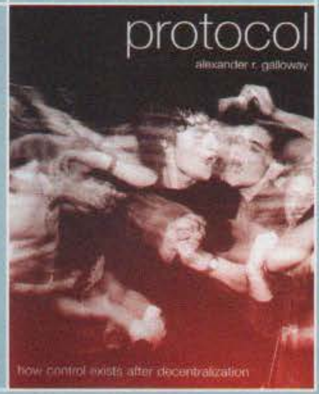
10 HG Wells: Five Great Novels

We don't often cover reissues, but then few reissues boast such quality as this HG Wells retrospective. With a fair claim to being one of the instigators of modern science fiction, Wells was a man before his time, as this collection demonstrates. Alien invasion, the fourth dimension, tanks, aerial bombardment, cross-species genetic engineering and the social responsibility of the scientist were all themes Wells got to grips with, decades before they actually starting to become headlines for the common man.

Born in 1866, his first success was The Time Machine (1895), a strangely distopian tale that mirrored Wells' own eventual pessimism concerning the likely future of mankind. Yet the novella, short at 70-odd pages, encapsulated much of the style that made Wells successful. Like the best sci-fi, his focus was always on the implications of discovery and invention, rather than the minutia of the technology itself. The Island of Doctor Moreau (1896), a disturbing tale of a scientist who creates new species only to sow the seeds of his own downfall, followed. A similar theme characterised 1897's The Invisible Man, with the highpoint of Wells' output coming in the shape of 1898's The War Of The Worlds. Best known as the book which terrified America thanks to Orson Welles' infamous radio broadcast, it remains Well's most satisfying work. The collection is rounded off with The First Men On The Moon (1901). It all combines to make an essential collection both for the fan and novice alike.

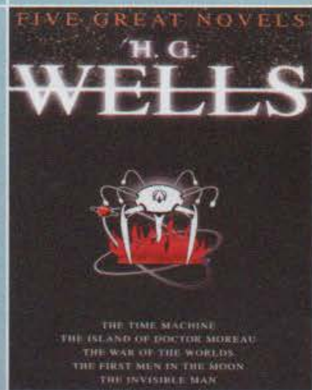
09

Author: Alexander Galloway
Publisher: MIT Press
ISBN: 0 262 07247 5



10

Author: HG Wells
Publisher: Gollancz
ISBN: 0 575 07572 4



11



Site: **agoraXchange**
URL: **www.tate.org.uk/netart/agoraxchange/**

11 The art of games

An art project commissioned by Tate Online, agoraXchange is a community website aimed at constructing a game from first principles. So, the game design room, where anyone can participate, is currently focussing on four areas – Game Context, Player Representation, Game Rules and Player Experience. By going back to the elementary components of design agoraXchange could produce something completely new, but since it is destined to be shaped entirely by its contributors, it's likely it'll fall into the same schemas games have always done. And that, we suppose, may well be the point. Whatever, it's interesting.

12 Advertainment

An American ad for GameCube, this. We are presented with a young man, clearly a gamer by his clothes, who is trying to explain himself to someone who appears to be his shrink. Is this saying something about GameCube owners?



Facing one another on some really rather nice red leather sofas, it begins. "Who are you?" she asks



"You don't know me? I've been swinging the bat!" he exclaims, over footage of *MVP Baseball 2004*



"Someone's gonna have to name a candy bar after me!" he continues in excitable fashion. Why's that?



From the desk, our new young friend proclaims that he has 'unleashed an evil wind.' Beans last night?



He also expresses the desire to 'overcome the mage's dark magic.' That'll be *Four Swords*, then.



Custom Robo scenes follow, along with "BOOYAH!" The shrink just looks confused. Fair enough, really.



So what's it saying? You'd be mad to own a 'Cube? You'd need treatment? US teens are nuts? Maybe…



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

Promises, promises...

And he said, yeah, Romero! Twice! [Applause] ... No, but seriously, ladies and gentlemen. Take RedEye's wife. [Laughter] So, anyway, *Galleon* is coming out in the summer. [Raucous laughter]

Thank you, thank you, RedEye's here all week. Weddings, Bar Mitzvahs and internet forums, performing to idiots savant and halfwit jackals. G'night, and God bless.

Well, Toby. Ferraris for each one of your toes, you said, and we believed you. We imagined you wearing them like ruby slippers, stomping in the direction of Core Design, a trail of pirate-style pillage and destruction proving that you weren't just a two-bit wonder. *Galleon* looked good, then. Six years ago, it came from nowhere, looked stylish and interesting and, in the first **Edge** preview, not so far off being a playable game. You gave it a couple of years. Maybe you were being cautious. Not cautious enough, though. Six years later and we were still waiting; six years of you dropping publishers, concepts and levels, the drip-drip-drip of new screenshots and gleeful whispers of the imminent collapse of Confounding Factor.

Schadenfreude. A funny word, one of RedEye's favourites. Sums up the nastiness of everything; the way humans can't help but glory in the failure of others. What is it about our nature that makes us want to see good collapse into bad? RedEye doesn't know, but it's what drives sales of gossip rags every day. We sneer – how lonely do you have to be to buy Heat to watch the Beckhams' marriage dissolve? – but at the same time each asterisked text message lights up fairy lights inside us, because if someone else is unhappy, then we're not the unhappiest. If someone else is unsuccessful, then we're not the biggest failures.

So, Toby. What can we learn?

For a start, don't tempt the gods. All that wanting-a-Ferrari-for-every-toe shiz: you were asking for it. There's no problem with having ambition, but if you shout that ambition in unashamed terms from the cover of a magazine, you're going to make enemies. And more than that, every story has to have a perfect arc, with pain and joy and, most of all, hubris. It wouldn't be much of a story otherwise.

Of course, this magazine has a part to play in that, too. The writer was looking for a soundbite and you probably said it as a comical aside and it was misinterpreted. Damn journalists. Either way, it was something you could have avoided. Was it innocence? Perhaps, but after Lara's boomtime publicity, you can't say that the way rats-with-notepads work will have come as a total surprise.

Then there's the bit about talking too early. Obviously you need publicity and support, but promising pleasure tomorrow and not delivering for years is going to aggravate all but the most patient thrill-seeker. You can't know what's going to happen in the future, what problems you're going to encounter. Still, RedEye's heard a hundred game journalists talk about the books they're writing. He just smiles, because people who are writing books don't talk about writing books. They go away and write them.

And overreaching. You've got to aim for the stars, says the optimist, or you'll never reach the heavens. Well, sure thing, but you've got to understand that if you torture the analogy some more and aim too high, load your rocket with enough fuel to reach planet *Daikatana*, there's a fair chance said rocket's going to spiral out of control and come crashing down, exploding in that field a couple of miles away where all the stupid PC gaming cows graze. That'll really piss the farmer off, and you'll end up with a pitchfork through your guts, working on formulaic RPGs for mobile platforms. Or something.

You need publicity, but promising pleasure tomorrow and not delivering for years is going to aggravate all but the most patient thrill-seeker

Take Demis Hassibis as a case. Go back to those issues of **Edge** in which he did a diary, and look at how it's written with such hope. It does not begin with arrogance, just humility, dreams and the long-term prospect of fun. But as long-term becomes longer-term, and the diary progresses – and later filters in with the crushed, splintered dreams of Brain In A Jar – you can read between the lines and see something else coming from Elixir, a nervousness. Because they can see the project spinning out, and they know what people are thinking, and they have absolute faith but there are only so many times you can say 'infinite polygon engine' before people start to snigger.

But now it is over, now *Republic* is finished and forgotten, Hassibis is much happier. We don't hear about *Evil Genius* so much, and when we do the designs are not so grand, and focused on an idea less leftfield than the political pipedream. They have learned as much as we haven't; interviews with Elixir reveal hope, not terror, confidence, not arrogance, and the game looks good, not grey. It all worked out, didn't it, in the end? So the joke's on us; he's made his game, still got his dream, and we're still flinging empty insults.

Does it matter that *Galleon*, as RedEye writes, is an industry joke? No, because the games industry's sense of humour is pretty shit – it is a recruitment advertisement with a half-naked girl and the line 'Simply the breast!!!' – and also because we've all got such short-term memories these days. A few weeks ago, RedEye found a forum thread where one user was telling another what *Daikatana* was, who Romero used to be. And, like *Daikatana*, that short-term publicity will work in the game's favour. Even if *Galleon*'s awful it'll sell more than it should just because people want to *know*.

Not that RedEye thinks that last point will be a problem. He's heard nothing but good things about the actual game. At least, when people talk about the game, they don't just snigger about how long it's taken Toby to finish his homework. It's OK. The comedians and their jackals will move on to Broussard next, and with any luck, it'll be Gard who gets the last laugh.

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge****'s*

So there I was, playing *Far Cry*, scampering around the tropical undergrowth like some sort of oversized beetle, a beetle who can drive boats and use a gun. "Look at the water!" I told myself. "Look at the trees! Look at the physics! This is great, isn't it?" Yes. Um… "Next!"

And so, having determined that *Far Cry* was indeed a very impressive game, I began idly daydreaming about just how good *Half-Life 2* was going to be. Verdant isles were all very well, but imagine how much cooler it would be in a grimy city, with enormous tripedal aliens. Then of course there were *Doom 3* and *Halo 2* to consider. The future seemed just around the corner. Suddenly, *Far Cry* seemed to be an impressive game not so much for its own virtues as for its status as a kind of staging post, a lovingly polished tech demo in the accelerated evolution of PC game technology.

It was at about this point that I realised I had



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Our insatiable desires

unwittingly been infected by a disease that apparently affects the games industry. Neophilia: a constant, insatiable desire for the next big thing.

How, you may ask, is this different from anything else? Of course there is a certain level of neophilia in all entertainment media. We can look forward to the next film by Takeshi Kitano, or the next novel by Viktor Pelevin, without being accused of being slavering future-obsessed geeks. But in the videogame industry, for one thing, the PR assault is a remarkably extended campaign, with gamers being drip-fed information about upcoming blockbusters over a period of years, until anticipation is at boiling point and the orthographically challenged hordes on internet forums are arguing the toss about games they still won't play for another year.

Contrarily, a new novel by your favourite author will generally be announced only about six months before publication, and it is not the usual practice to release 'demos' in the form of prose extracts or to give away key plot details. And, at the time I am writing this column, it is only a few weeks since I learned that a new album by Prince will come out after the weekend, the shock of this news being enough to convince me to wait and suspend judgement, even though the first single is evidently the kind of tedious pseudo-James Brown funk the Purple One has been absent-mindedly tooling for more than a decade since his legendary 'return to form' was first promised.

So the videogame industry positively encourages a feverish level of neophilia through its longterm machinery of feature announcements, screenshots and ropey demos. (Let us quietly pass over the compelling conspiracy theory that the demos are, in fact, deliberately engineered to be ropey so as to convince people to buy new graphics cards.) This is only compounded by the multiple-vehicle pile-up that is its release timetable.

Of course, there are certain times of the year that are more busy than others in other media – September for the big-gun novelists hoping to get shortlisted for the Booker Prize; June and July for the latest blockbuster Hollywood confections – but the games industry takes this to absurd extremes. I review one game a week for a newspaper, but during December 2003 the schedules were so stuffed with good games, as well as the usual tsunami of seasonal money-spinning tat, that several worthy contenders fell by the wayside. Is it any wonder that by this combination of frenzied long-term hype and release bunching the videogame industry is not so much shooting itself in the foot as using a rocket-launcher to blow off both its legs, and then complaining when it falls over? By the time a game comes out, gamers are already mainlining hype for the Next Big Thing, and so what is actually in front of our eyes and under our fingers inevitably seems already a bit old. And who can blame gamers if they fixate on technical details such as bump-mapping, lighting and physics, when that is what we are being told is exciting about *New Firstperson Shooter 37: The Dark Conspiracy*, which in all other respects is just a crappy rip-off of *Halo* and *Deus Ex*?

Great games are not given space to breathe (witness the near-drowning of *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time* in the pre-Christmas crush), and the incessant churn of mediocrity rumbles on in a way we are expected to regard as evolution.

And, of course, some of it is. Indeed, a large part of the aetiology of the disease called neophilia is the fact that videogame technology is still developing, and technology is the enabling force for gameplay. (You can't code *Halo* on a Spectrum.) This state of affairs is certainly good for ATi and nVidia, but is it good for consumers? I have a fantasy in which all technology development becomes illegal for a number of years, so that anything that is 'new' in a game will be a genuinely creative new gameplay idea, rather than a prettier way of drawing plants. Something like that fantasy is already in place in the console product cycle, and one has to ask: how many real gameplay innovations have there been in the last five years on the PC, and how many on consoles?

I don't mean to blame the PC for all the world's ills, however. Many console developers, too, take the neophiliac route and concentrate on squeezing more polygons out of the same hardware rather than designing truly innovative games. On the other hand, the PC is a cheaper platform on which inventive developers may prove their talents.

So maybe there is no cure for neophilia, until that perhaps-mythical day when technology will have matured, hardware can do anything you want, and developers are thrown back on their creative juices. In the meantime, my treatment has been to play through *Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes*. Instead of stamping on my memories of one of my favourite games, this souped-up 'director's cut' caresses them, plays with them and shows just how far ahead of his time Kojima really was. *TTS* doesn't need to be the next big thing because it already was six years ago, and it can now be enjoyed for what it is in a nearly hype-free zone. Because of this, it has been one of my most pleasurable recent gaming experiences. Mind you, just imagine how good *MGS3* will be…

By the time a game comes out, gamers are already mainlining hype for the Next Big Thing, and so what is in front of our eyes seems a bit old

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Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: steven_poole@mac.com





AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi, general manager, Sega Creative Center division

Bowled over by beef

Again? Yes, I'm not directly speaking about games this time. This may disappoint some of you, but I find the need to write about one of the hottest events happening in Japan at the moment. I'm dead busy working as one of the top managers of Sega and as the leader of Amusement Vision at the same time. Did I forget to tell you that I'm also a producer? Yeah, this is not easy, especially with E3 coming up damn fast. I have to be sure that everything is going to go smoothly, at least for Amusement Vision! Managing Sega is not easy, either. I mean, the company is doing much better, but we still have a lot of work! Don't forget that it has only been a handful of years that we have been going to E3 as a developer and not promoting our own platform. Of course, we still keep up a very strong hardware business with our arcade division – we develop new technologies and boards and then market them. So, in a way, we have still one foot in the business, after all. Anyway, let's get back to my subject of concern this time...

This column is about food, Japanese food. No, I'm not just writing about it because I'm so busy, as I explained before. No. It is just that what follows is one of Japan's key incidents, and it also shows one of Japan's key behaviours.

Do you know about gyudon, or beef bowl in English? It is an orthodox and very simple meal – you have some beef on rice with a sauce based on shoyu (soy sauce) with some sugar. The Japanese love this. I'm pretty sure that when it comes to Japanese food, most foreigners think about tempura, sushi, etc. These are the words that first come to your mind, right? But imagine that you have to eat them each day. It's going to be very costly for your everyday budget. What is great about gyudon, besides its taste, is that it costs just a tenth of these other meals.

For people who don't have much money it is the dream meal, offering a good proportion of rice and beef at the same time. This explains its high popularity among the Japanese. Its place in our society equals the very traditional noodles or the Chinese ramen. I could talk about gyudon like a soul food: you really eat Japanese. What you may not know is that, in Japan, gyudon is prohibited right now. Why? Because of the case of mad cow disease found in the US. All the gyudon restaurants in Japan import their beef from the US, and because no beef is coming into Japan they can't prepare any gyudon.

Of course, they could do the same meal with beef from other countries, or even from Japan, but this meat is too costly. Don't forget that gyudon's popularity is about cost as much as nutrition and taste. Plus, not all beef offers the same properties. For example, Australian beef does not have the same taste as the beef prepared in the US especially for the Japanese market, so an Australian beef gyudon would not be as delicious as one made with US beef. Japan is the main export market for US beef, and the American companies have a huge part of their business oriented toward this market. It is thanks to the US that we are able to eat cheap beef – don't forget that Japan is not a big breeding ground for cows! The American companies have adapted their meat to meet Japanese tastes, so actually it is a very different product from the one sold in America.

It looks as if it is going to take time for the ban to be lifted, and there has been a gyudon frenzy.

The Japanese can be so loyal to something, almost crazy for it, but if they have to do without it then they turn their hearts to something else

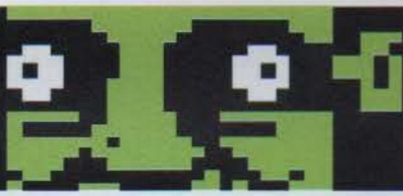
There was this terrible news: gyudon is going to disappear! This spread all around Japan and people became mad. It was like McDonald's closing in the US: no hamburgers to eat the following day! Can you imagine that? That was the kind of impact it had on Japanese people. So people were eager to go and eat the last of the gyudon. "It is going to disappear!" This became an obsession. Even the people who were not eating much gyudon were queuing in front of gyudon restaurants, victims of the media's 'End of gyudon!' campaign. This was not without its troubles. One customer and a restaurant owner had a serious argument because there was no gyudon left. Hopefully nobody got hurt, but it has been heavily reported through the media.

It was perhaps from this moment that things got out of control. The biggest gyudon restaurant franchise, Yoshinoya, used the internet to launch an appeal to restart US beef imports. Moreover, the company sold some of its remaining gyudon on an internet auction, and prices went sky high! I was surprised to find how much those around me were attached to this low-cost meal... I don't know how to feel about this – is it really unusual or is it just that people are stupid? Because there are so many other good things to eat in Japan.

And then another restaurant franchise, Matsunoya, had some incredible news: the company managed to secure the very last reserve of US beef, and announced it would sell a very limited supply of gyudon! Wow! I was expecting a feeding frenzy, but everything went very quiet. There were no queues, and it didn't sell out quickly. Very strange. One of my staff, who is really fond of gyudon, explained it to me. He used to eat gyudon every single day, so when I told him about this limited supply he agreed to go and find out about it, but he was not as passionate about it as before. He said: "Great, but only today, right?" I was surprised by this remark, as I knew about his fondness for this meal. He said: "I love this food, but it is going to be sold out soon. So I won't be able to enjoy it for long and I realised I could live without it when it sold out the first time!"

It made me realise something about the Japanese. They can be so loyal to something, almost crazy for it, but if they have to do without it then they turn their hearts to something else. I should keep this in mind in my work. Now that games take so long to make, is it dangerous for popular game series? Will people lose interest? It's like a ticking clock! And there's another thing: gyudon is so much a part of Japanese culture, but it's dependent on an American ingredient. Is the same true of videogames? It's certainly true of Sega, but that's a thought for another day. Maybe even another column. One about videogames!

Prior to Sega's recent restructuring, Toshihiro Nagoshi was president of Amusement Vision



BIFFOVISION

Page 28, press hold, and reveal. 'Digitiser's founder speaks out

Script for a tester's tear

Talent abuse is a common whinge among creative people, but one that isn't without some basis in reality. In this consumerist society, most outlets for creatives are controlled by big businesses whose sole function is to make money. The grand irony here is that most creative types only moan about the lack of respect because they want to make more money out of their 'art' than they currently are. Oh, sure, they'll berate their fellow artists when they 'sell out', but it's not always easy to produce anything other than a cloud of noxious bottom gases when the taxman, the landlord and the credit card lady are rubbing their swollen stomachs up against your patio windows.

Radiohead might have dressed up their money-making with plenty of right-on integrity and supposed artistic independence, and they may have banned corporate sponsorship from their gigs, but they still travel home in gold-plated hover-limos driven by chauffeurs cloned from astronauts, and when they get home they eat pies full of edible cheques. Or so someone told me.

In my professional capacity, I have straddled the worlds of music, film, TV and gaming (not just because I've been paid to sleep with executives from all four) and it's games that are the most afflicted by talent abuse. At a recent industry summit, disillusioned Naughty Dog boss **Jason Rubin** announced he will be leaving the company he co-founded as soon as work on *Jak & Daxter III* is complete. He slated the industry's current publisher-led structure, urging developers to rise up and slay the evil publishing dragons and their fascistic, numbers-fuelled marketing departments. "Talent must force the change," bellowed brave Sir Jason, waving a broadsword above his unnecessarily naked body for emphasis.

Rubin has a point, though, even if it is one we've heard before. One glance at the games charts and it's clear the industry orbits around licensed product and well-milked cash cows. It's almost as if the industry has lost its nerve. Gone are the days when gaming was led by its own brands, now we're all forced to suck on scraps tossed aside by 'proper' entertainment. Gaming should be getting books, TV shows, albums, films, comics and new sports based on its properties – not the other way around. Developers who take chances with their games risk not finding a publisher or, as in the case of Zed Two's sublime *Future Tactics* (neé *Pillage*), seeing a game you've spent years working on snuck out at an insulting budget price because it didn't slot into any established, marketing-endorsed genre. And then being closed down by your parent company by way of a thank you. And before you start accusing me of throwing sour grapes around, I'm not just saying that because I worked on the game's storyline (it's because I'm John Pickford's bitch).

The marketing types and the publishing execs will always argue that the mass market would rather see familiar games that feature familiar faces from the world of sport or telly or film. *Pillage* would've kept the suits happy had it been a Buffy the Vampire Slayer product. Had that been the case, Zed Two wouldn't have to bother making an original or entertaining game, they could've just filled the packaging with cat shit.

Admittedly, some games may seem to sell better, but only because, firstly, the likes of, say, *Original Game 57* are not being marketed to the mainstream. These less-easily-bracketed games are not shipped out in sufficient quantities or sold in Tesco, and the mass market is primarily made up of ignorant dunderheads who don't know about the full range of games out there because there's a huge gap in the gaming press between the arse-end and the high-brow. Finally, people don't know what they want until you give it to them. So what's a developer to do? Sit plodding away on *Officially Endorsed Product A* and let those brilliant ideas for reinventing the platformer rot in his brain? Or – as Rubin urges – get off his sweaty pontoons and do something about it?

Something needs to be done to inject imagination back into a rapidly stagnating industry, and get the power in the laps of those with ideas

Marillion. It was only a matter of time before I mentioned them in **Edge**, I know. Having become discouraged by the way the music industry was becoming focused on easily marketable pop acts, and disillusioned by the poor terms of the deals they were being offered, the band chose to go it alone. For their 2001 'Anoraknophobia' album, they stepped outside the industry and got their fans to finance the record via a unique pre-order deal. When 'Anoraknophobia' sold over 100,000 copies, the band repeated the trick. 'Marbles' – out this month – once again asks fans to cough up for a record before a note of music has even been recorded. Those that do receive a special 2CD version and get their names printed in the deluxe edition's sleeve notes. This time, Marillion seek to become more independent still – advance orders not only fund the recording, but also the marketing of 'Marbles'. Their only contact with the industry is through distribution and a radio plugger.

The move allows the band to retain their musical integrity – with gloriously unfashionable ten-minute-plus tracks – while sucking up the lion's share of the profits. Now, while not being naïve enough to think this business model would work for every games developer – certainly not those working on multimillion-dollar firstperson shooters and the like – surely there must be some way to take the publisher (and many of the overheads) out of the equation? Admittedly, Marillion are in the unique position of having a rabid fan base willing to put their faith in a band to produce an album they'd want to hear. The same could be said for only a handful of developers.

It may work best once retail and distribution are booted out of the equation, when we get to the point where electronic distribution is truly economically viable and fully embraced by consumers. Would I have paid £40 for *Pillage* two years before it was released? No. But if I knew I was going to get something special, I may have paid £20. Either way, something needs to be done to inject some imagination back into a rapidly stagnating industry, and get the power squatting firmly in the laps of the people with the ideas.

Mr Biffo is a semi-retired videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge****'s*

Edge's most wanted

Monster Hunter

An unexpected hit on Japanese release, the 'PS2's PSO' needs a speedy western release like we need a new matching wyvern-leather tunic, hat and gloves.



(PS2) Capcom

Shadow Of Rome

If anyone loves alternately sun- and blood-drenched Roman melodrama more than us, chances are it's Keiji Inafune, Capcom's hardest-working smile.



(PS2) Capcom

Gradius V

It's a familiar choice, but Treasure's return to the title that was its opening salvo now features its most attractive addition: a (US) release date. Roll on July 11



(PS2) Konami

Espgaluda

Conversely, the game to fill the gaping hole in the PS2's library for a neon-laced, gore-streaked, rave-soundtracked steampunk shooter is slightly delayed.



(PS2) Arika

Drawing on drawing

Why we need more fake games

Last year was a pretty good year for reality. *Project Gotham*, sun-drenched but sterile, gave us a lifetime of perfect city breaks in a weekend. *True Crime*, flawed but inventive, gave us the whole of LA, whether we wanted it or not. *Siren*, beautiful but horrible, gave us truly human faces blanched with fear and truly human voices cracked with strain.

This year, it looks like being a pretty good year for film-flam. For delusions and mirages and hallucinations. *Dragon Quest*, *Viewtiful Joe 2*, *Paper Mario*, *Crimson Tears*, *Rakugaki Akuku 2* and the newly announced and newly astounding *Okami* all start from a entirely fantastical premises. Game creators are professional imaginers, and it's vital for the vitality of gaming as a whole that it remains commercially viable for that imagination to be as unfettered as possible.

Half of what's fantastic about games is that they let us do the things we wish we could, but can't – the well-documented wish fulfilment of fast cars, twin pistols and holes-in-one. But the other half is that games can let us do things we never even knew we wished we could do. None of use knew we wanted to coax a hesitant girl made of light through a deserted castle. None of us knew we wanted to force a demented hedgehog to loop the loop for our pleasure.

Games exist in a continuum, which stretches from sober simulations, through forgiving sports games, past loyal film adaptations, and beyond 'traditional' sci-fi into pure invention. Where titles fall on that continuum has no bearing on how good a game they can be, nor a reflection on the imaginative power of the developers concerned. *Full Spectrum Warrior*, when it arrives, will have taxed the creativity of the team at Pandemic as sorely as *Viewtiful 2* will test the minds of Clover Studios. What does matter, however, is if games start to bunch together rather than falling across the whole range.

What's real is real. It's already in front of us. Film, however creatively it has evolved, remains grounded in the process of placing a machine in front of something real – or at least something tangible – and recording what happens. Games have no such base zero. Like animation, art and comics, they start with nothing. Nothing but everything and anything inside the head of their creators. They can draw heavily and successfully on the real, in the same way that films can draw heavily and successfully on the fantastical, but it's a territory that will always remain somehow alien.

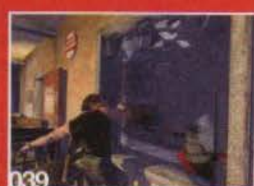












Dragon Quest VIII: Sky, Sea, Earth & The Cursed Princess

One of Japan's most cherished franchises gets the Level 5 cel-shading treatment. But can it convince the DQ hardliners?



Little is yet known about the oddballs that form your team. Jessica will be able to wield her whip in battle and Youngus' trademark spiked hat will presumably add some punch to any headbutt attacks







Although the adventure itself is shrouded in secrecy, it's clear that significant portions of it will rely on members of your team going solo. They'll need to be properly equipped for the battles ahead





Many classic *Dragon Quest* characters put in valuable appearances, but the polygonal makeover clearly makes all the difference

Now, that's some subtitle. But, while we're a little disapproving of extended appellations, we'll forgive Square-Enix for the moment. *Dragon Quest* is, after all, one of videogaming's most venerable series. The original is credited with kicking off a nation's widespread fascination with the RPG and helping the Famicom to infiltrate millions of Japanese homes before Link was even born. Such beloved material has to be handled with care.

And there's already been consternation in some quarters about *Dragon Quest VIII*'s direction, especially its art style. Apparently, it's not to every fan's liking. For the first time a *Dragon Quest* adventure is to take place in realtime 3D, ruffling the feathers of traditionalists but delighting those who've already seen the images of characters in motion. Level 5 took on the role of thirdparty developer some time ago and its influence shows in every thick black line. But however beautiful, it's clear that the cel-shading remains a touchy subject for some.

Those concerned about the series' integrity should be aware that the original *Dragon Quest* triumvirate is still in force: Yuji Horii on the design and story, Akira Toriyama on art and Koichi Sugiyama composing the music. And it's not as if the developer has a poor reputation – Level 5's experience from creating the *Dark Cloud* series and the perfectionism it is exhibiting with *True Fantasy Live Online* are both clear to see. It's difficult not to get excited by the prospect of an RPG handled by one of the most creative studios working in Japan right now. Getting the balance between innovation and respecting tradition will be key to the game's eventual success – at least in Japan.

Along with the delicious cel-shaded 3D universe comes a day/night cycle that is to have a significant impact on the adventuring

The big changes first. Along with the delicious cel-shaded 3D universe comes a day/night cycle that is to have a significant impact on the adventuring. Creatures and events will be influenced by the time of day and, as you might expect, it's likely that travelling at night with only the moonlight as a guide could be far more dangerous than dawdling along on a hot summer's day. (Rumours abound that weather changes will also have an impact, but this is currently unconfirmed.) The world is so large that transportation spells will be introduced to help players get around more quickly, though this is only likely to come into play when characters have attained higher levels.

The group is made up of four main heroes, with another driving the party's caravan, while the horse pulling the load will also play an incidental role in the story. The battle system is also new to the series, with the player controlling one character at a time rather than the 'free switching' system seen previously. And of course the character under the player's control changes depending on the scenario. *Dragon Quest* staples, meanwhile, include a return of the familiar creatures as well as 16bit sound motifs, menu styles and save points in churches.

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Square-Enix**
Developer: **Level 5**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **TBC**













There is still scant information about the quest itself, but it's unlikely to upset conservative Japanese tastes. There will of course be towns replete with weapon and supply stores to help fill your caravan full to bursting, and a large dose of non-player character interaction is guaranteed. It might not sound like the most original or effervescent cocktail, but Level 5 does things with such exuberance that it can turn a trip to the village well into an adventure.

Despite some early reservations, *Dragon Quest VIII* is proving to be one of the most anticipated games in Japan for years. While the whispered rumours of a PAL release are unconfirmed, the fact that the series has previously performed well in the US – under the *Dragon Warrior* moniker – gives a shred of hope. It will hopefully be a case of eighth time lucky for those looking to find out what all the fuss is about.





Enemy encounters (above) initially evoke memories of the previous *DQ* titles, but the presentation cranks up when combat kicks off

Viewtiful Joe 2



The hero that made pink Lycra cool returns. Can the sequel do as much for pom-pom-waving cheerleaders?



Sylvia is no longer the straight-laced heroine of the first game, ditching her glasses and romantic intentions for pom-poms of doom. If this was still the '70s, she'd make the perfect Bond villain



The sight of a toon-shaded Dante sticking his tongue out at the audience can only mean one thing: Shinji Mikami was so incensed by Tsuyoshi Tanaka's direction of *Devil May Cry 2* he has turned to art to vent his fury. Seriously, though, Dante is back, but this time he's fighting in Movie Land, home of the unexpectedly popular GameCube hero Viewtiful Joe.

But hang on, isn't Dante exclusive to PlayStation2? Let's freeze frame, zoom in, and take a look at this in more detail.

The answer is that there's double the good news. Alongside early details of the sequel, Capcom has confirmed that the first *Viewtiful Joe* game will be rereleased on PS2. Alongside all the viewtiful goodness from the original GameCube version, it's been confirmed is that Dante will be available as a playable character once the main mission has been completed. Trish, Dante's Ducati-obsessed sidekick, will also appear, though it's unclear if she plays a major or minor role in the game.

Slow down, Mach speed and Zoom will all return, but there's also a new VFX power called Replay, for recording realtime action



As the number of hearts attests, *Viewtiful Joe 2* is being planned as an easier challenge from the outset. Sweet!

Viewtiful Joe 2, however, is a whole new game, destined for release on both PS2 and GameCube. The energetic plot that held the original together is unlikely to be radically overhauled for this sequel. Once again the evil Gedow Empire is launching an attack on Movie Land, and once again it's Joe's job to thwart the invasion and prevent a rift from forming between the celluloid world and Earth. This time, however, Joe is joined by Silvia. Transformed from the bespectacled damsel of the first game, she is to become a fully playable heroine complete with pom-poms and what can only be described as a 'zap' gun.

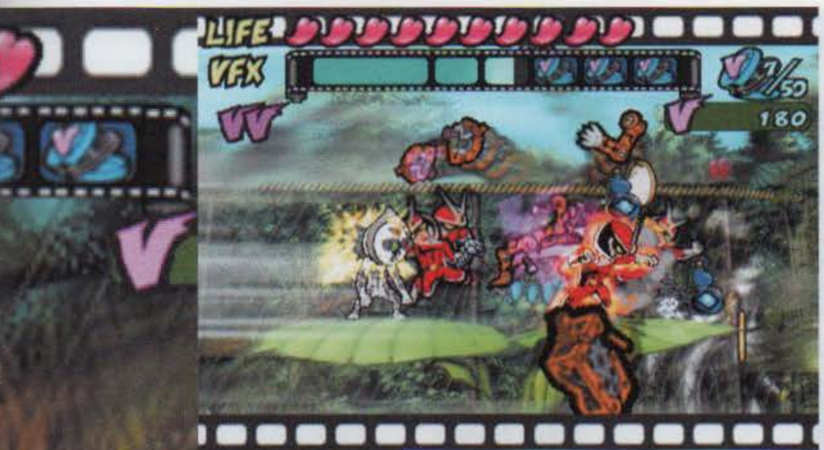
Along with Silvia's ability to bash the screws out of enemies with her cheerleader kicks and flips, her pink missiles should bring a fresh approach to combat. Both characters can be taken all the way through Story mode in either solo or co-op play, with the latter incorporating 'tag-team'-style combo attack Joe will be able to punch an enemy into the air so Silvia can finish it off with one of her ra-ra techniques.

As exciting as all this is, the VFX super powers were what made *Viewtiful Joe* so joyous first time round. Slow down, Mach speed and Zoom will all return, but there's also a new VFX power called Replay. Armed with this technique, players will be able to record a few moments of realtime action the replay it back to multiply certain bonuses. Hi Replay while Joe is scoffing a hamburger, fo instance, and the health bonus he receives i multiplied by three. The same applies to damage inflicted on enemies, though a note of caution should be sounded: it's entirely





Format: **PS2, GC**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **Clover Studio**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **TBC**

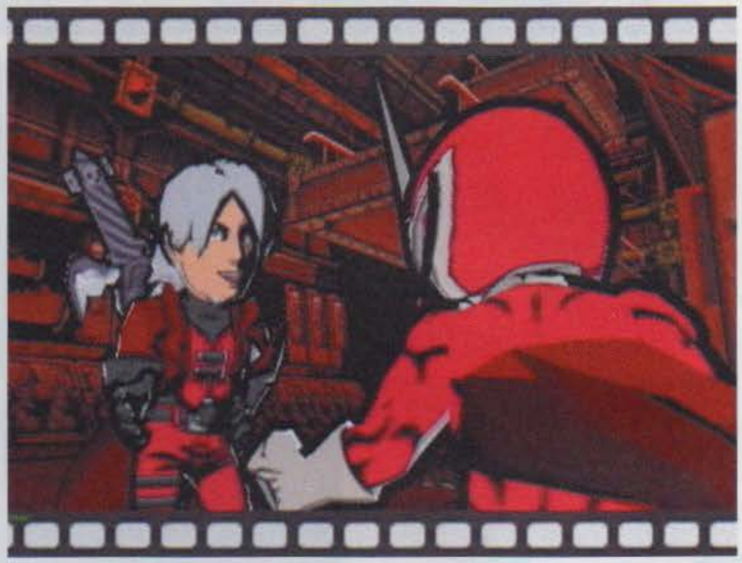














possible for Joe to take three times as much punishment if the Replay button is hit at the wrong moment.

Production of the game has switched from an in-house team to Capcom's newly formed subsidiary Clover Studios. However, this doesn't imply any change of direction. Clover is formed substantially from staff drawn from the Viewtiful team – indeed, the studio is headed by Atsushi Inaba, who produced the original and stays at the helm for the sequel, and director Masaaki Yamada will also repeat his role.

Viewtiful Joe 2 will be one of Capcom's headlining games at E3 and an end-of-year release is likely. Leaving plenty of time for you to dry-clean the cape and practice that 'Henshin-a-go-go' battle cry.

Each screenshot in the right-hand column comes from the PlayStation2 rerelease of the original *Viewtiful Joe*. Dante has never looked so cute







Mario Story 2

Format: GameCu
Publisher: Ninten
Developer: In-hou
Origin: Jap
Release: 20

Mario's real day job isn't plumbing, it's platforming. Here's what he really gets up to on his holidays



The name could hardly be more misleading – *Mario Story 2* is actually the sequel to what was called *Paper Mario* in the west. And '2' is also wrong – there have already been three games in the loosely defined series: the delightful revelation of *Mario RPG* on the SNES, the simple charm of *Paper Mario* on the N64, and just last year the irrepressible *Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga* on the GBA. The series is loosely defined partly because it has been handed round a range of talented developers – the first game was famously authored by Square, the second by Intelligent Systems, which was home to the brains, brawn and beauty behind *Advance Wars*.

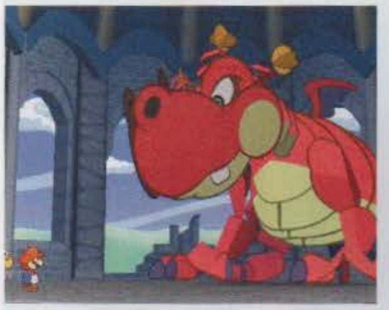
Nothing is known, yet, about the plot of *Mario Story 2*, other than that Princess Peach won't be a helpless patsy. She'll be one of several playable characters who will make up your adventuring party. These RPG elements of the series have always been simple, but soundly satisfying. While there are no endless pages of numbers, and no vast wardrobes of enchanted knee-pads, the irresistible rota of levelling up and learning new skills drives you through the game as effectively as much mor complex examples of the genre.

For the sequel, Mario's paper nature is more than just a cute graphical trick. Early reports suggest that it might be possible to fold him up into a paper aeroplane and fly hin to inaccessible places. Nintendo, coy as ever won't confirm if these origami evolutions form an active part of the gameplay, but other shapes seem tantalisingly possible. A folded frog Mario who can boing to higher ledges? A buoyant boat Mario who can cross oceans? A deadly dodecahedron Mario who can… well, perhaps not.

Putting the dozens of enemies in *Four Swords+* to shame, Nintendo is claiming that Mario will face off against to up to 1,000 bad guys – if not bad shy guys – at a time.

The battle system, preserved throughout the series, seems intact. Enemies are visible on screen, and combat only kicks off when you come into contact with them. The turnabout battles are presented as theatre performances, with an audience of koopas cheering and booing your every move. Careful use of the trademark timed boost will add power to your own attacks and help block those of your opponent.

The *Mario RPG* series was always where the best jokes happened, where the Mushroom Kingdom as a whole came to life. On the vibrant evidence on show from *Mario Story 2*, it's no wonder the world's favourite platformer always holidayed so close to home.



The mix of flat-shaded characters and polygonal environments means *Mario Story 2* is boldly distinctive. Whether walls will fold flat as they did in *Paper Mario* remains to be seen











What is already certain is that *Mario Story 2* wi provide a whirlwind tour of Mario's greatest hit There are hints of *Mario Kart 64* and even *Yosh Story* to be seen alongside more obvious lifts

Resident Evil: Outbreak File 2

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Q4 2004**

The inevitable second instalment of online survival horror suggests its designers took that formative school trip to the zoo harder than most

Though we have our reservations about the first *Outbreak* title (see p102), the impressive numbers the game pulled in its home territory – over 340,000 – have resulted in Capcom continuing its online spin-off (although it's probably fair to say that there was a minimum of arm-twisting involved).

The new scenarios will follow the continuing flight of the eight *Outbreak* cast members from stricken Racoon City. The first scenario is set in the city zoo, in which players will be expected to deal with the facility's mutated inhabitants. These threaten to be faster, smarter and more unpredictable than the human strain – the exception to this rule being the imposing bulk of a virus-infected elephant that will lumber after the players as an indestructible threat (until, we presume, meeting its end in a convoluted set-piece).

Characters will boast a new repertoire of actions – hopefully more involved than being able to swim through certain sections, as shown in the screens – but the rapid pace of development suggests few major overhauls from the first title. That's not necessarily a bad thing with regard to graphical fidelity, but optimisation of the loading times would be welcome, as would attention to in-game communication (or the lack thereof).

The major area of contention will be the scenarios themselves, and whether Capcom appreciates that the singleplayer *Resident Evil* formula makes for a clumsy, predictable multiplayer setting. If reports that the original *Outbreak* was developed as a standalone title and then kludged to support online play are accurate, then it could be hoped that the sequel will see levels built with the full intention of strong multiplay focus. The constraints of the engine will still apply, though, as will the lure of a loyal market that will buy the game regardless of missed potential.

At least *File 2*'s European online future is looking more assured than its predecessor's. The numbers signing on for original *Outbreak*, and to a much larger degree *Monster Hunter*, have proved lucrative for Japanese broadband provider KDDI – currently providing matchmaking services for Capcom's PS2 online titles. The company is now looking at the possibility of expansion into the US and Europe, and such a service would likely arrive in time to support all the online zombie-baiting the territory can handle. Until it's more obvious whether *File 2* is a revamped game or a full-price expansion pack, we advise against waiting with bated breath.















While clashes with Racoon City's ravenous residents will still feature heavily (left), it's the elephantine boss (top) that is, quite literally, the greatest obstacle the characters will face. Where is Umbrella's stock of laboratory mice when you need them?

The Red Star

Format: Xbox, PS
Publisher: Acclai
Developer: Acclaim Aust
Origin: U
Release: TB

The arcade-style scrolling actioner is back in vogue. Few examples, however, look quite as tasty as this



Only two of the game's three playable characters are currently on show: brawler Kyuzo, who can impale foes on his double-bladed sword, and street fighter Makita, who wields a hammer and sickle to brutally satisfying effect

The tip-off should have been the source material. The comic The Red Star – following a rebellion against the state in a Soviet-dominated alternate future – is critically acclaimed and adored by fans, but hardly a safe licence to cushion an anaemic game. Sheltered from the attention (and constraints) of a more expensive name, Acclaim's Austin studio has quietly worked magic.

As a list of features or page of screenshots, there's little to distinguish *The Red Star* from other thirdperson action titles, save its blocky, bold imagery. Playing it, however, reveals a game suffused with both a love of the medium and an implicit understanding of how the great titles work. It's already showing the smart, weighty production that was so dynamic in *Metal Arms* and *Transformers* – and this is a one-level, supposedly alpha, preview copy.

Charging over the decks of the flying fortress Konstantinov, scattering the enemy ranks with blades and gunfire is a familiar experience, but not lazily so. It's familiar because the controls and pacing feel right, and because this is the best '80s coin-op you never played. It's not all reassuring memories of cabinet-kicking youth, however, as the last enemy wave breaks and a boss fight begins i a malignant coil of bullet patterns. At this stage they don't have the intensity of a Cave shooter, but it almost feels like it – you'll be fairly certain of triumph, but it's still an air-punching thrill when you achieve it.

It's clever design, repeated in scores of tiny details and paced with calculated precision. In fact, the only aspects that don't move with regimented grace will initially be your characters. But replay is mandatory, and it remains fresh even when you've reached th point of playing one step ahead of the game.

There's really little to find fault with here, save foreground scenery occasionally obstructing the action. Then again, there is little of the game's content on display either. Each new addition will tip the fine balancing act on display, and each new level faces the unenviable task of building on what has already been set. The greatest challenge may well be maintaining the old school values *The Red Star* sincerely exhibits while remaining accessible enough for those values to not be a 16bit kiss of death. The game's imminent E showing will go some way towards clearing c compounding any doubts about whether the crew of the Konstantinov is the only revolutionary thing here.







Boss fights encourage freeform tactics; bullets can be dodged, absorbed with a short-lived personal shield or destroyed by melee attacks



Gunslinging comes in three flavours: firing in the direction of movement, or using the triggers to lock either movement or aim, for crowd control or precision targeting respectively







There's no enforced distinction between melee and ranged combat; one player can lay down a barrage of suppressing fire while the other dashes in to pitch harried enemies overboard. In addition, the final version will see players able to power up their partner's attacks

Sahara

Format: **PS2, Xbox, PC**
Publisher: **TBC**
Developer: **TKO Software**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Spring 2005**

Could this actually be an oasis in the desert of movie-licensed games? Or is it just a mirage?

Yes, it's a blockbuster movie tie-in. Yes, the film appears to be a perfunctory 'Indiana Jones' clone featuring bland B-lister Matthew McConaughey in the lead role. And yes, at first glance, the game looks like an identikit thirdperson brawler.

Before you run for the hills, consider the intriguing story behind developer TKO Software. The company was founded just two years ago with cash from a bond scheme, but it's already employing 150 staff across four studios in Santa Cruz, Dallas, Austin and Dublin. It developed the *Breakthrough* expansion pack for *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* and is currently coding the multiplayer functionality for *Pacific Assault*.

In addition, TKO has its fingers in the mobile gaming pie and recently acquired *Ashen Empires* MMORPG developer Asylumsoft. So while *Sahara* is designed specifically to shift serious units in the mass market, TKO's versatility and creative independence should elevate the game above play-safe mediocrity.

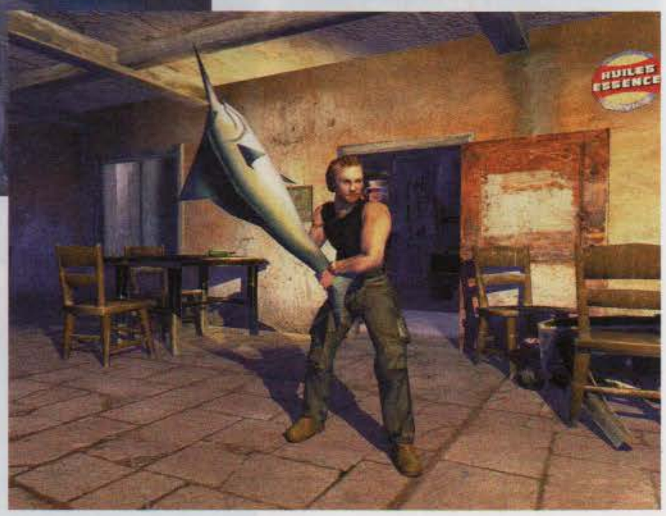
The fundament of a rollicking, ripsnorting (insert own action movie poster cliché here) adventure is already in place. Ammunition is deliberately hard to come by, so hero Dirk Pitt is forced to confront most enemies with his bare hands. A simple system of punch, kick and grapple moves – augmented by more advanced combos – lends a satisfying physicality to combat, especially when you get to throw enemies through windows.

One of *Sahara*'s defter touches is the interactive scenery. It's a hollow promise in most games, but here you really can pick up or destroy any piece of furniture to the point where you're swinging at an enemy with a stuffed marlin or a recently liberated chair leg. Dirk's sidekick Al Giordano (played by Steve Zahn in the film) is also a playable character, boasting more stealthy characteristics and a skill for demolitions. The ability to pilot vehicles is strictly de rigeur for all action games nowadays: in this case, it's jeeps, gunboats, trains and a sand surfer – the DIY desert sailing vessel that Dirk and Al build in a pivotal scene from the 'Sahara' movie.

TKO admits that *Sahara* isn't intended to innovate on a grand scale. If anything, the game is a testbed for the developer's fledgling Liquid FX engine, for which it has great plans. However, if TKO is able to create a superior action romp that remains visually faithful to a big-budget Hollywood movie on its first attempt, the future looks bright.







In *Sahara*, fully destructible scenery promises to be a genuine thrill rather than an idle boast. We've only played a few scenes, but these included the possibility of attacking enemies with TV sets and giant stuffed fish. The astute AI responds in kind

Crimson Tears

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Dream Factory
Origin: Japan
Release: Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)

Capcom invites you to sign up for button-mashing and skull-cracking with a minimum of brow-clutching











Crimson Tears marks the last stand for Dream Factory apologists, still holding the torch of *Tobal*'s brilliance through the endless night of misfires like *The Bouncer* and *Kakuto Chojin*. Mercifully, the game should go some way towards restoring Dream Factory's reputation, or at least stemming its decline. A hybrid of beat 'em up and randomly generated dungeon romp with an eye-catching anime treatment, it may encapsulate all that is stoically traditionalist about Japanese development, but it does so well for the most part.

An inconsequential story – set as ever in a post-apocalyptic Tokyo – presents your three corporate-engineered fighters: Asuka, a twin-blade specialist, Kaede, master of the wonderfully oversized Buster Sword, and Tokio, a dual-gunslinger. Regardless of their talent, each character is free to use blades, guns or fists and feet at will, and each fighting style has a different dynamic; each character's moves are performed with personalised timing and accuracy. Individual weapons can be customised and combo trees upgraded in an almost overwhelming display of variation.

What's not obvious on your first dungeon jaunt is how this variation is actually relevant within the game: the two-button combat may seem painfully stilted compared to the *Ninja Gaiden* new school's unrestricted grace, but this is a deliberate choice, recalling the chunky functionality of Capcom's side-scrolling arcade brawlers, and provides immediately tangible rewards for furious scrapping.

Lengthy combos (which appear to be skill-boosting, rather than just number fetishism) are only possible by fighting your way out from the centre of a crowd, rather than the safer option of one-on-ones. Meanwhile, continued strikes on slain enemies shake free extra coins, like some morbid piñata, for as long as you can juggle them without missing a beat.

Both of these systems are demonstrated a little too well by the early enemies' unwillingness to put up much of a fight, and *Crimson Tears*' lasting appeal could be questionable if your foes remain like these guileless punching bags. The welcome instances where they do respond in kind suggests a ramping up in intensity is likely, though, and even overpowering the early hordes is kept tactile by lively animation and the item-collecting drive.

It's in no danger of redefining the scrolling beat 'em up (that aim remains in the court of Sega's near-mythical *SpikeOut Xtreme*) and could be too retrograde for others, but those who calloused their fingers on the likes of *Final Fight* and *Cadillacs & Dinosaurs* are advised to watch this space.

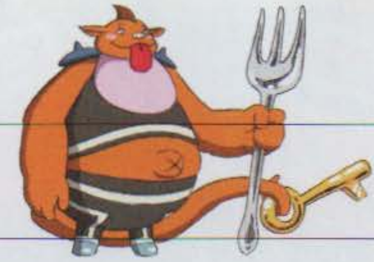
Screenshots don't express the nuances of *Crimson Tears*' kinetic visuals – characters flicker with a refined version of the 'backlit' cel-highlighting effect first seen in *ZOE2*, and combat flows with the choreographed, impossible elasticism of the best anime fight scenes







Rakugaki Akuku 2







Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Taito**
Developer: **Garakuta Studios**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Summer 2004**

The innovative Magic Pengel makes a return as a platform adventure featuring what might be the worst textures ever





It's clear the new drawing system makes it much easier to produce rounded shapes, and to join them together without making a mutant

Magic Pengel (**E**129) was one of last year's surprise delights. A simple combat RPG, its point was that you drew your own characters, enabling the game to animate your doodles into fully mobile 3D characters. The sequel moves from the confines of the scissors-paper-stone battling of the original to the freedom of an action adventure – with all the potential stumbling blocks that genre brings.

However well Garakuta Studios rises to the challenges of camera control, free combat and platforming precision, any *Pengel* game will always rise and fall on the quality of its doodle animation system. In the first game, it was immaculate. Instinctive and sophisticated, watching the game breathe life into your scribbles was an irresistible piece of Pinocchio magic. Once labelled as 'tails', 'wings' or 'jaws,' shapes would swish, flap or chomp as needed. The sequel expands the system, allowing more precise 3D shapes to be created. Hopefully it won't become too complicated, and end up encouraging earnest draughtsmanship instead of inspired cartooning.

From these early shots, it's clear that the main concerns are the dismally poor environments on offer. If Garakuta can close the gap between the screenshots and the concept art, then *Rakugaki Akuku 2* could be a proper fairy tale.





In the first *Pengel*, the colour of an enemy gave you information on its strengths and weaknesses. The same system could feasibly translate very well into live action combat

Chaos League

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Digital Jesters**
Developer: **Cyanide**
Origin: **France**
Release: **June**

Some people are on the pitch. They think it's all over. They're throwing explosives...

Cyanide's entry into the combat sports market pays an obvious – some might say borderline litigious – homage to *Blood Bowl*; but in the absence of an update to that 1995 PC game, fans will find much to like about *Chaos League*. Its crucial difference is the decision to relay the action in a realtime strategy fashion, but a turn-based option is available for board game purists.

Each match-cum-brawl is a series of rushes for the opponent's end zone, preferably with the ball – although this tactic can be abandoned in favour of brutalising the other team. Alternating between the two is recommended, as the crowds will react to 'boring' play by pelting the pitch first with rotten fruit, then with axes and explosives. In addition, Cyanide claims that its AI will analyse and respond to player tactics – the abundance of spells, skills and play formations suggest it will be sorely tested.

Off the field, number-crunchers will be pleased by the expansive team management options. Individual players have statistics and skill trees to be boosted, and your ascent through the league table requires some tactical fixture planning.

A multiplayer mode currently supports up to three human-controlled players per side, and this may yet increase before the game's projected summer release.





The game's interface will be immediately familiar to RTS players – your team can be given complex waypoints to follow or simply clicked in the direction of the nearest brawl





The game's arenas display a welcome artistic flair, from a jungle pitch that sees the teams competing in knee-deep water to this balloon-illuminated twilight city stadium



King Of Fighters: Maximum Impact

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SNK Playmore**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **TBC**

Previously in **E**136

A 3D departure for the King Of Fighters series, but no departure in the design of female characters...





Moves and jumps are performed on the D-pad, while the face buttons control punches and kicks, remaining true to the Neo-Geo configuration

This game is very different to the *King Of Fighters* games that have gone before. It's closer to a game like *Fatal Fury*, and even Team Battle mode has been dropped in favour of a standard one-on-one configuration. Entirely in 3D, the L1 button will allow the character to sidestep around his opponent while locked on, and fighting commands have been made as easy as possible, with a new system to allow players to edit their combos while in action.

Adapting a 2D fighting game to 3D is never easy, and as most of the *KOF* characters were optimised for 2D gameplay, SNK has had to rethink them for 3D. In doing so, their moves seem to have lost something, as an attack designed for the 2D world does not have the same impact in 3D. A few additions will need to be made to the moves to capitalise on the third dimension.

The quality of the 3D is nothing exceptional, but nothing bad either, especially since SNK is a relative newcomer to the 3D fighting arena. The backgrounds to the battles currently look quite empty, and are far removed from the highly animated environs of the 2D series. As for the characters, series devotees will surely relish seeing them more fleshed out, perhaps especially in the case of female fighter Lien, whose form follows a distinctly Tecmo-style approach.



The plot concerns gangland street fighting rather than a tournament as in previous instalments, as the fighters attempt to clean up Southtown



Athens 2004

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Sony**
Developer: **Eurocom**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **July**

Previously in **E**135

Not so much jumpers for goalposts as jumpers for thumb-protectors. You may also want to pack half a Kinder Egg pod while you're at it

Athens 2004's presentation is very crisp, but might be a little off-putting to those who aren't braced for what to expect. The Athens committee, in their wisdom, have picked as their mascots two strange blobs with skin for hair and feet like hobbits. These chaps guide you through the wide range of events – from horse jumping to clean and jerk and men's rings to skeet shooting.

It's still a little rough around the edges graphically – somehow all the athletes look like they have Harold Steptoe's teeth – but some models, especially the show-jumping horses, really shine. Controls all centre on the button-rubbing frenzy which *Track & Field* elevated to an art form, but there's much more variety on offer. Women's floor gymnastics uses a very familiar-looking bemani-style arrow system, and it will come as no surprise that this event is designed with a dance mat in mind. Physical jerks aren't limited to one event, however – the mat will work with most events. Shooting calls for an analogue aim and the discus requires some precision stick-waggling.

The main problem is that some events aren't scored until the end – there's no tension in the vault if you don't know how your competitors are doing. Unless, of course, you've got a multitap tucked away in your sports bag.





There are traces of rhythm action all through the game, such as the left-right-left demands of the high jump run-up. The same system gives you more slo-mo 'air time' for twists during the vault





Players can take part as any competing Olympic country. Characterisations of different sportsmen are very strong, especially the Bahamian team

Prescreen Alphas This month's announcements and updates

Sega Superstars

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sonic Team




Pipping SCEI's *Ape Escape EyeToy* to Alphas, Sega's EyeToy project invites players to fend off *HOTD* zombies, enter the *Virtua Fighter* tournament, play *Samba* sans maracas and more

Banjo Pilot

Format: GBA
Publisher: THQ
Developer: Rare




Diddy Kong Pilot pops from the de-Nintendoizer as *Banjo Pilot* and promises fourplayer link-up and the kind of weapons-based racing frenzy which made *Diddy Kong Racing*'s name on N64

Flat-Out

Format: PC, PS2, Xbox
Publisher: Empire
Developer: Bugbear Interactive




A chance to test drive – and repeatedly crash – a new PS2 preview reveals it has survived the port mostly intact, leaving the major corner-cutting to the player as they storm across sandbox courses

Metroid Prime 2: Echoes

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Retro Studios




Prime's follow-up hopes to make its mark on the *Metroid* universe with the introduction of a new race, the Ing – and, perhaps more controversially, the provision for fourplayer deathmatches

Legend Of Golfer

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Seta




A realistic golf game from Seta, a company that has had a long history of working with Nintendo. As is now standard with golf games, your golfer's stats can be built up into the best in the world

Okami

Format: PS2
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Clover Studio




Emphatic proof of life after *Viewtiful Joe*, Clover Studio's first original project is a graphically striking 'nature adventure' – we'll have more to follow on game and developer next issue

The Urbz

Format: GBA, GC, PS2, Xbox
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Maxis




Build your urban-living Sims' – sorry, Urbz's – 'rep', deck them out in 'bling' on the streets and ultimately become a 'player' in EA's bid for the edgy dollar. Don't you be hating on it now...

Under The Skin

Format: PlayStation 2
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Production Studio 4





Surprisingly, *Panic Maker* – previewed last issue – will be seeing an American release, along with a new title that should confuse the shelf-browsing public as much as the game's content might



Prince of darkness

Having seen Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time win critics' hearts but fail to dominate the charts, Ubisoft is looking to the dark side in an attempt to bring the sequel to a wider audience…





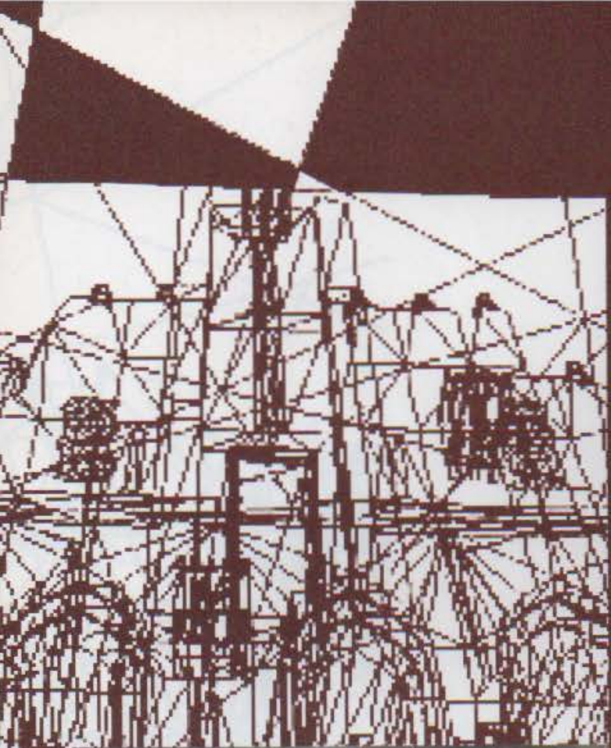
What would you do if you could turn back time? Fans of *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time*, whether paying punters or industry insiders, have been agonising over that question in recent months. Ubisoft's game generated a great deal of affection as it neared completion and then reached market last autumn, but that never quite seemed to translate into a tangible mass market presence and popularity. If expectations of an instant *Vice City*-sized cultural impact were a little extravagant, it's still not difficult to appreciate why it was a game that people felt like rooting for.

Sands Of Time felt thrillingly modern, but alive to the fundamental importance of old-fashioned videogame adrenaline, too.

It majored on story, but it didn't subordinate control or interaction to its narrative needs. It eschewed excessive length and obscurity for non-stop thrills, and sidestepped the traditional infuriation of instant platform death with its smart rewind trick. It gave needy gamers puzzle-previewing dreams before they tackled a new room, but old hands could skip them. It seemed like a bold new prototype for a type of game that could potentially thrill hardened veterans and reinvigorate the conservative mainstream market at the same time.

Sure, *Sands Of Time* was stylish and stylised, but not to the extremes of a *Rez*, *Mojibribon* or *Ico*. Parts of its style succeeded by out-slow-moving *Max Payne* and *Enter The Matrix*, while, at speed, the prince's movements emulated the pure buzz of being an absurdly accomplished acrobat which its creators at Ubisoft Montreal had so admired in the *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* games.

Some had questioned the value of the licence in the modern marketplace but, again, that was the

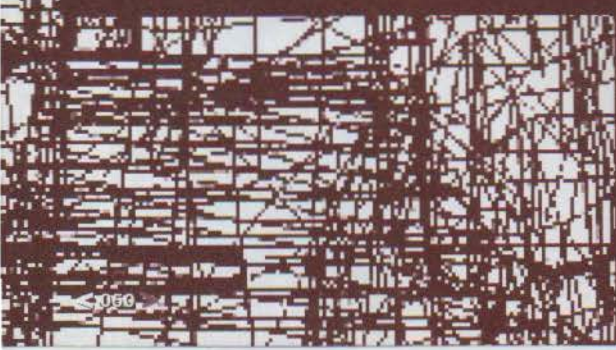




BLACK FOREST CHATEAUX

Sands Of Time palace out, gothic malice in

Though in many respects a classic 3D platformer, one which evolved control-first in the manner of *Mario 64*, *Sands Of Time* resisted the temptation to build its challenges around a grab-bag of world types straight out of 'classic' videogame scenery stock – lava levels, ice levels and their ilk. Instead, one grand sultan's palace full of surprises, contrasts and well-paced, load-free transitions, hell-deep sewers and impossibly bright ledges served all purposes in a single Arabesque structure. In *Prince Of Persia 2*, an ominous Germanic castle will provide a similarly singular environment, though the sequel's developers insist that additional pains have been taken to ensure that the player will feel as though he or she is moving through many.



point. The game seemed an exemplary case of updating a beloved, long-dormant videogame in precisely the ways you'd have expected if you loved the original – and then expanding on that to extravagant ends you wouldn't have dared to expect. But if its heritage meant nothing, surely prospective purchasers would still see it was a brilliant, stunt-packed, blockbuster in the finest Indiana Jones tradition?

From the moment *Sands of Time* entered the UK PS2 charts at number ten last November, however, some people began to wonder what had gone wrong. So many hopes had been invested in the game, it seemed that if only time *could* be turned back and events corrected, a single tweak could have changed everything. Few, however, agreed on what that single tweak should be.

Some blamed the exclusivity deal with Sony that saw the game's GC and Xbox releases confirmed late and not released until this year, reasoning that a multiformat appearance would have stopped it being overshadowed by the marquee brands that towered over the Christmas season. (That doesn't explain its comparable fate in the US, despite near-simultaneous releases on all consoles and critical acclaim there.) Others said that the *POP* TV advertising and poster campaigns missed the point. A few grumbled about the ten-hour playtime, some repetitive and overlong fight sequences, the game's sudden difficulty spikes or a couple of especially bemusing puzzles. There were all sorts of if-only explanations. What was agreed was, first, that something had been missed out on and, second, that it was right to fear that such a missed opportunity could threaten the sequel that had been spoken of even before *Sands Of Time*'s release.









The gothic desig influence is hardl original, but Ubis feels that a darke atmosphere is cr to wider acceptan

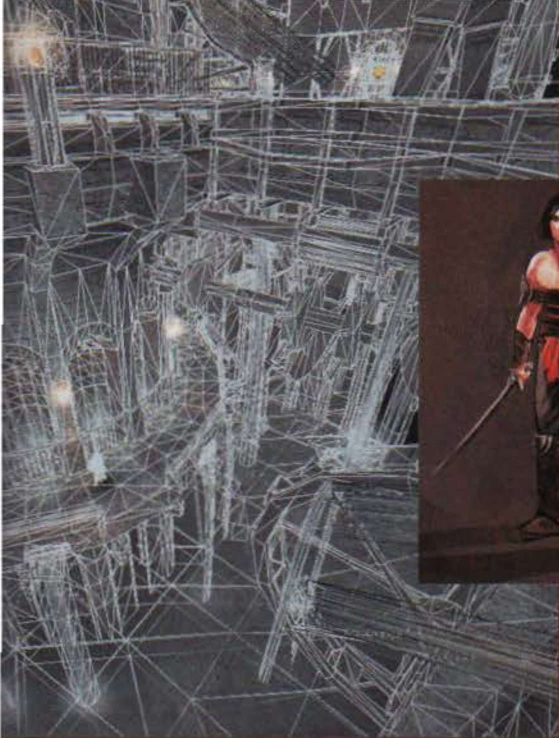
No, no, no

It was 'no' on both counts from Ubisoft, though. Exclusivity deals and all, the company announced in February that *POP* had shifted two million copies worldwide by the end of 2003 (though the proportion of those sold as parts of bundles, which were widespread, was not revealed) and pointedly excluded it from the list of underselling titles (*XIII*, *BG&E*) cited at the same time. Since Christmas, the publisher has been able to point to new year sales, too; at time of going to press, in mid-April, *POP* had climbed two places to number 19 on the UK all-formats charts after 25 weeks on sale.

It was a 'no' to any suspicion that the stomach for a sequel weakened after initial results for *POP*, too. At Ubisoft Montreal, producer **Bertrand Helias** says the sequel project has been "full steam ahead" since his work on it began last summer. "[*Sands Of Time* is] really a success story for Ubisoft. In two ways, in terms of awards by the press and the industry, appreciation by the public and so on, it's really one of the biggest success stories from Ubisoft."

Positive news – but is the company aware that there's a perception otherwise?







The prince's new clothes: early character designs from *POP2* show an eagerness to ditch the pastel-coloured pantaloons









"Yeah, I know there is a perception, but that's not the case," he says with a little laugh. "It was a success, not just at Christmas time – the story continued after. Europe was very strong for GameCube – it has done very well. Very, very well."

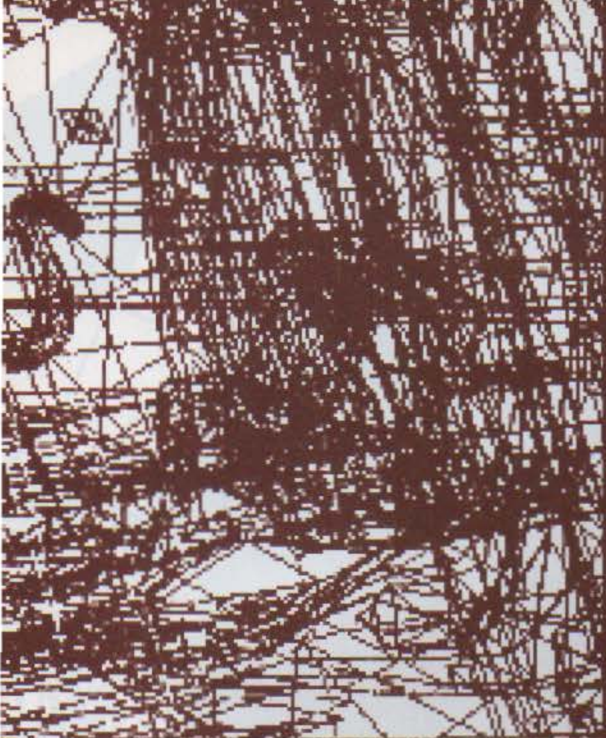
If there was any one explanation that still seems to make some sort of sense, and that might stick, it was a rather more mundane one. It was one of the early anxieties of some observers – that *POP* was an action game that lacked the essential decorative trimmings to woo today's mass market – urban reality, beefcake biceps, guns. It was a uniquely sexy game, but perhaps it would have pushed more buttons if it had stuck to conventionally uncomplicated videogame evocations of sensuality of the WWE wrestling-cum-pornstar variety. Perhaps it's no coincidence, then, that aesthetics is the one realm in which the *POP2* team is happy to declare an all-new approach.

Changing the prince

"First of all, I think," Helias explains, "that we want to change the prince. Now he will be better in fights. He will have a better attitude. The prince will have more charisma. We want him to be darker, we want him to be a better fighter – do you see what I mean? When he will go on a new adventure, he will know what combat means."

That shadowy sensibility extends to the sequel's all-new locales, and the logic is clear – a bit more Marvel-moody, bulked-up, bad-ass: less All About Eve, more Evanescence – for, you know, the kids. Ageing romantics smitten with the mood of *Sands Of Time* might have grounds to fear the onset of this gothic darkness – the diaphanous elegance and sandstone-and-silk palette of the original was all about lightness of touch. However, given that these cosmetic alterations are the number one area of change for the *POP2* team, more champions of *Sands Of Time* will surely be reassured by the news. Beyond the makeover, Ubisoft wants to produce a game that celebrates *Sands Of Time*'s achievements, rather than seeking to outdo them for the sake of it.

Indeed, the process of making the sequel began with standing back and looking at its predecessor. From last summer, as *Sands Of Time* was being hastily readied for a winter release, producer Helias began to consider its completion. The development of the first game could have been smoother – an early engine and the team behind it was scrapped, while Jordan Mechner, the creator of *POP*, wrote the story and had the rights to veto any new product Ubisoft developed from his IP, so his involvement and approval were crucial throughout. Then the team showed what they had described as a mere demo at E3 2003, and scored such a positive reaction that they returned to work to discover that Ubisoft no longer wanted the finished game for 2004, as its developers had been assuming, but to hit shelves by Christmas





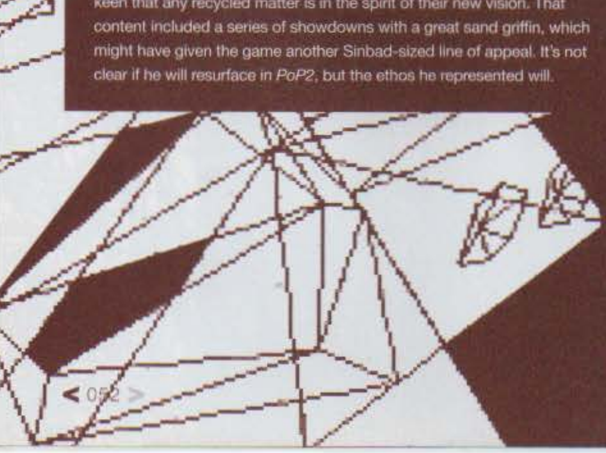




RECYCLING PROFICIENCY

What *POP*'s rush to the shops left in the locker

After entering last year's E3 with what they regarded as a 'good demo' and emerging with five months to finish it, the pressure to complete *The Sands Of Time* meant tough decisions for the team. There was a notion of releasing the game in two halves, months apart, but once that was talked down the solution became ditching what *Sands Of Time* producer Yannis Mallatt estimated was 15 per cent of the intended content. It's not simply a matter of reintegrating everything, of course – the new team is keen that any recycled matter is in the spirit of their new vision. That content included a series of showdowns with a great sand griffin, which might have given the game another Sinbad-sized line of appeal. It's not clear if he will resurface in *PoP2*, but the ethos he represented will.



– cue frantic months of bug-squashing and last-minute alterations to what had begun life as the *Beyond Good & Evil*-based Jade engine.

Another Christmas present

POP2 is also set for a quick turnaround and a pre-Christmas release, but a similarly tortuous saga seems unlikely this time. Around 50 staff – roughly the same number as worked on *Sands Of Time* – are working on the title, though only around 20 per cent of them worked on the previous game. With the first game providing the ready-made multiplatform technology, animation for the prince and related gameplay features, work on the sequel focused first on researching a new look and atmosphere rather than anything under the bonnet.

Then, there was the luxury of cherry picking the best of the features sacrificed from *Sands Of Time* in the rush to make the game ready for market. "They were full of ideas," says Helias, still bubbling with admiration for the work invested in that earlier game, "and we worked with those ideas first. We kept some of them, but some of them were not really in keeping with the treatment of the new game. There were very great ideas in the previous game that we wanted to keep, of course.

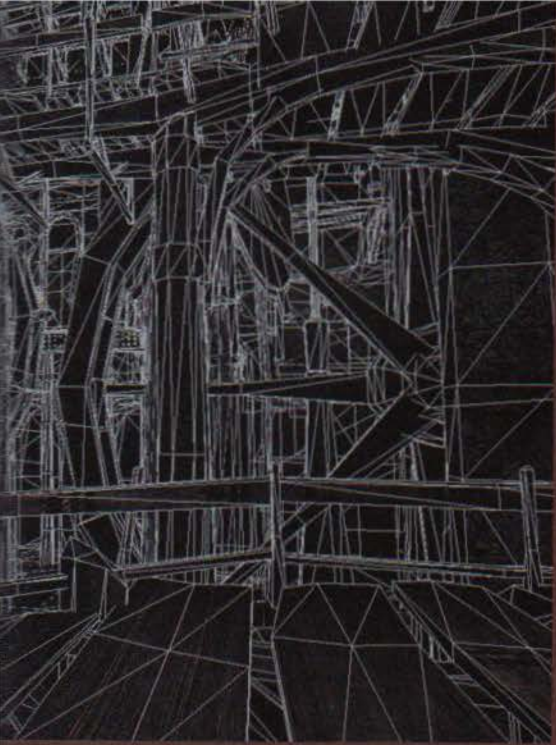
"There were some bosses that were designed in the first version but not implemented because of the time constraints. Some of them are very good ideas, so of course we keep these ideas – every good idea is good for a game, we don't want to change that." Jordan Mechner, who had power of life and death over *Sands Of Time*, has not been significantly involved in *POP2*, but Los Angeles scenarists Secret Agents were enlisted to work with the Montreal team in his place. "We want to have all the attention around the story," says Helias. "The story makes the game. You could have a good game but a bad story, but a good story can mean a good game. A very good story with a very good game, that should be one to keep. We want *POP2* to have the same feeling at the end when you play *Sands Of Time*; that relationship of gameplay and story – the two are evolving together."

And the elements of that story? Time is again of the essence, with *POP2* beginning a few years after the end of *Sands Of Time*. "At the very beginning," Helias says, "the prince doesn't understand that what he has done in his previous life – unleashed the sands of time – will have consequences."

Those consequences will have teeth, and the prince is at the top of their hit list as he is pursued by hordes of new monsters angry at his upsetting of the timeline. "He will have to fight for his life," says Helias, shedding some more light on the deeper relation of the prince's gloomier new look to the sequel's story. "They want him dead because of what he did to time. The main purpose of the game is that the prince has to save his life, and









The action is again confined to one grand location – this towering gothic castle – but boasting a vast selection of interiors









Compare the gloominess of these *POP2* environments with the original game's pristine Persian palace and it's obvious where development is headed





the game will be based around the solutions for him to escape and to destroy what is behind him."

Another parallel with the original will be its confinement to a single dominant location. Rather than make the prince platform his way through generic lava and snow levels for the sake of it, *Sands Of Time* put the prince in a grand palace and made him stay there. "In *POP2*, we will have the same thing, but we will bring in new elements so different that for the player it will feel like going to different places," Helias explains.

The Saturday-matinee smarm of the prince's narration turned out to have been part of a clever conceit when you completed the original. Moreover, it might not fit the newly menacing world in which the prince finds himself. Understandably, the *POP2* team is still mulling over whether to reuse the device in the sequel. Any *Sands Of Time*-style subtitle will have to wait, too: for now, it's just *POP2*.

Prince of the gym

The prince was a thirdperson avatar of unprecedented flexibility and mobility when he arrived on the scene late last year. Now he's about to be joined by *Galleon*'s Captain Rhama, with *Ninja Gaiden*'s Ryu – another new icon of wall-running, ledge scaling elasticity – already here. Has the *POP2* team had much time to play it?

"We play a lot of games. *Ninja Gaiden* is a good game. A little difficult from my point of view," Helias laughs, "but that's only my point of view. To compare the two titles? I think it's difficult for us to say how we could. There is some difference, some similarities. What's important for us is to do something different with *Prince Of Persia 2* from the beginning and bring some very strong story and gameplay. We are proud of *Sands Of Time*. We want to do something similar."

For all *Ninja Gaiden*'s almost *Zelda*-like polish and comfort of control, and the movements the hero shares with the prince, there is something a little more automated about the acrobatics of Tecmo's game – motion is utterly impressive, largely effortless and most often a means to an end. In *The Sands Of Time*, pulling off unfeasible gymnastic feats is an ecstatic end in itself. And for the sequel – however much innocence has been replaced by experience, adventure by flight, golden desert light by more familiar videogame gloom – that ethos remains intact and elemental.

"The moving is very important, the action of the prince is something that we want to keep," Helias explains. "We just do more. More action, more diversity in all of the moves the prince will be able to do – when he moves somewhere, or when he's in combat, we will give more freedom to the prince to do what he wants to do when he wants to do it, rebounding on to enemies, control of what you can do – cross the wall, jump, grab the end of the rope." Hang on.



A bard's tale

The return of two gaming legends: an audience with the man putting the orcs back into Orkney

The best stories are worth hearing again, and it's been nearly two decades since players gathered around a roaring hearth at the Adventurers' Guild for this particular tale. In that time, **Brian Fargo** has founded Interplay, produced some of the most important western roleplaying games of the PC era, and most recently stepped down from the now Titus-owned company to form a new studio, InXile. And begun, again, with *The Bard's Tale*.

It's a retelling that has learned from its lengthy respite. Gone are the hours of min-maxing, stat-crunching, and random encounters with '99 mercenaries, 99 mercenaries and 99 mercenaries' ("We have a joke about that," Fargo grins). Leading on consoles and using Snowblind's hard-working *Champions Of Norrath* engine, it seems – mechanically, at least – to have little in common with its PC predecessors. As it turns out, this is entirely intentional.

"When I was at Interplay, I had friends who would get a PC, and they'd ask me, 'Which of your games should I play?'," recalls Fargo. "And I would never recommend my own RPGs to people who had just got a system – it's just too much for them to figure out. So I want to make this genre more accessible by giving it lots of personality."

For *Bard's Tale*, that personality is an arch self-awareness in place of the genre's traditional

self-importance. The bard himself is a grudging hero, like Don Quixote portrayed by Edmund Blackadder, who spends the game either lamenting the absurdity of RPG conventions or losing his nerve when those conventions are gleefully upended. "We wanted a character who questions things, who behaves like he's played too many RPGs," Fargo explains.

The supporting cast is equally distinctive, from the unreliable narrator guiding (and gilding) the story, to the armourer who describes his wares with the zealotry of a used-car salesman. As with the classic LucasArts adventures of Gilbert or Schafer, snappy back-and-forth dialogue enlivens even the most passing asides. Excellent voice acting compliments the script, with the first ten minutes featuring possibly the thickest authentic Scots brogues ever to grace a videogame. Fargo promises the finished version will feature no American actors murdering European regional accents (unlike the preview build, which lapses into placeholder readings from the development team), and hints that a well-known British actor is set to voice the bard.

This Anglophile casting is explained by the setting: striking away from the well-trodden Dungeons & Dragons path, *Bard's Tale* draws visually and thematically from the Orkney Islands. Fargo has paid the area lip service before, naming the original game's city after Orkney's Skara Brae, but the new game has been built around its mythic history from the ground up.

"It's not something we're relying on in terms of a selling point," says Fargo – although he concedes wryly that liaising with the locals during development has ensured its success among console-owning islanders – "but if you've got a rich history already there, it's like licensed content. It's a huge creative head start."

Fargo's confidence in the narrative content has seen some familiar RPG tasks stripped back in order to focus upon it. Saleable items looted from fallen enemies are immediately converted into gold, precluding the usual trudge back to town with ten spare suits of eldritch plate mail. Similarly, weapons and armour are almost treated as power-ups: only the best of each type is ever equipped, and obsolete gear is instantly taken off and cashed in.

It's a brave piece of streamlining, considering inventory management is one of the great artificial extenders of an RPG's playing time. But Fargo intends the *Bard's Tale* experience to be all about the journey, not the backtracking. The game's length, and its subsequent replayability, will stem from 'constant cause and effect' – though there is an overarching storyline, the majority of content will be triggered by player action. Conversation branches, the most obviously loaded events, are handled in an especially mischievous fashion. Instead of a list of responses, the player is presented a blind choice of being either a charmer or a boor, and then faces the consequences of the bard's artistic interpretation.

Such consequences may not surface until hours into the game, making *Bard's Tale* practically impossible to judge from a half-hour preview, despite Fargo's infectious and boundless enthusiasm. He agrees that personality isn't an easily demonstrable selling point, especially in an environment such as E3 (even *Knights Of The Old Republic* originally received a muted response on the show floor). It's here that the game benefits from attractive presentation – an earthy solidity created by photographic reference and thoughtful art direction – and the immediate familiarity of the gameplay. Ideally, it will succeed both with players buying a hack-and-slash who find more than they expected and by using its charm to draw in those who'd otherwise turn their nose up at another action RPG.

In the latter's case, Fargo recalls a magazine editor appearing unannounced at a showing of the game because she wanted to hear the dialogue – "a thousand monsters and 500 spell effects wouldn't have gotten her in there," he declares, vindicated. But some have simpler desires: he is asked if it will be possible to attack the game's chickens, possibly a fair request of the man who gave us foes 'exploding like a blood sausage' in *Wasteland*. "Oh, sure, that's in the new build," Fargo nods, then turns to us and shrugs apologetically. "Everyone wants to kill those chickens."

Excellent voice acting compliments the script, with the first ten minutes featuring possibly the thickest authentic Scots brogues ever to grace a videogame



Impressively, *Bard's Tale* uses an engine built for an RPG-lite evolution of *Gauntlet* to portray a far less throwaway setting





An accessible control scheme ensures the wide range of abilities and weapons are never more than two button presses away









Outdoor ares are particularly lush, making exploration enticing rather than a chore





The locales shown so far are varied, yet maintain the sense of a consistent world





You and whose army?



In another break with RPG tradition, there's no rag-tag band of mismatched adventurers to assemble in *Bard's Tale*. Instead, support comes from song-summoned minions, each bearing their own specialised ability. They include a hulking brute who blocks incoming ranged attacks, a lithe archer who peppers foes with crossbow bolts, and a blind beggar who seeks out traps ahead with his cane. Each summoning song must be learned during the course of play: as the adventure opens, the bard's entire repertoire consists of the ability to summon a rat.

Those longing for more corporeal company are advised to spare Roxy the dog a kind word in the opening section of the game, as she will then faithfully accompany the bard on his journey. Fargo hints that she will prove a useful ally; but as with any other choice in the game, the player is free to refuse her company. If, for example, they hate happiness.

Format: **PC, PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Acclaim**
Developer: **InXile**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Oct 2004 (PS2, Xbox), TBC (PC)**



No holds bard

Talking roleplaying with Brian Fargo

What's the response been like to the concept of a console iteration of *Bard's Tale*?
With a lot of people the immediate reaction was, 'Oh, you're going to dumb down.' No, we want to take the depth and complexity of a PC RPG and bring it to console, in the same way that *Knights Of The Old Republic* did. When I started *Bard's Tale* there was no *KOTOR* – I'd never heard of it – and so my thesis was we could do a game this way. And then *KOTOR*'s success proved to me that the console audience would want it.

Did you choose the *Norrath* engine for its audience familiarity?
I guess the choice was twofold: we're technolog averse, we want to focus wholly on the content. And I put a lot of time into *Dark Alliance*, and I thought, 'They've just scratched the surface here and there's so much to be done.' Don't get me wrong: it's a good game, and everybody loved it. So we wanted to take that same philosophy of gameplay, but put a thousand pages of design document behind it.

I also think as time goes on, engines will become more ubiquitous. It's horrendously expensive to create the engines, and it doesn't make any business sense to redo them all the time, so you'll see more people using middlewar solutions. InXile's in a good position, because we're really good at creating content.

What about the conception that middleware use will dilute the variety of games?
Again, it's about the content – nobody says, 'Oh no, Spielberg's using Panavision, I wonder if the movie's going to be any good.'

You're treating RPG clichés with warm humou in *Bard's Tale*, but do you feel the genre needs to lose some of its traditional baggage?
They need to get a lot more creative. We've been accepting these clichés for so long, but I'm hopi that when we point them out, people are going to stop accepting them. I was at last year's E3, and walked up to this guy's booth and asked about h game. And the plot was: 'There's this evil, and it's 200 years old, and it's re-emerging…' I went to t next booth and asked about their game, and the start: 'There's this 200-year-old evil…' It was like something out of a mockumentary about our industry. It's unbelievable that we're doing the same things every time.

So we're trying a more fresh, humanistic approach. We all want to be known as an artform that will be talked about in a hundred years, but the end of the day people don't remember technology, they remember human interaction. Recently I did an interview and they asked, 'What's your favourite videogame character?' And I couldn't think of one – I mean, you can say

Five of the best from Fargo's Interplay years



The Bard's Tale (1985)
Bard's Tale brought a rich audio and visual treatment to the previously black art of computer roleplaying games. It's arguably more important as a historical document than a rewarding play experience now, considering its savage difficulty.



Wasteland (1987)
The bleakly humorous chronicle of a Desert Ranger posse bringing law to the lawless in post-nuclear Nevada, *Wasteland* was one of the pioneers of open-ended structure, and still features prominently in many gamers' top RPG lists.



Neuromancer (1988)
Not only a rare example of a licence done justice, but an expertly constructed game in its own right, using a simulated bulletin board system to express the paranoid, isolate atmosphere of Gibson's seamy virtual noir.



Fallout (1997)
Black Isle's spiritual successor to *Wasteland* took that title's strengths – skill-based character growth, an open game world, and multiple solutions to quests – and improved upon them with an inspired, uniquely memorable retro-future aesthetic.



Planescape: Torment (1999)
Regarded by many as the greatest Black Isle title, and by some as the greatest PC RPG, *Torment*'s densely plotted story of an amnesiac immortal's turbulent self-discovery makes magic out of a messy Dungeon & Dragons setting.

Mario, Sonic, but they don't mean so much as a character, it's more that the game was fun. And I thought that was strange. So it is kind of a signal that we need to start feeding personality and soul into games.

Which is your focus with *Bard's Tale*.
Absolutely. And what I find interesting is that I talk to people about our putting personality into the game and there's a negative reaction – as if it affects the gameplay, or the graphics. It's almost as if they think we only have X amount of hours and that has to go on either the engine or the story. And good writing doesn't take more time. It takes more discipline and desire, but it's not more expensive to write. You play these games where you can't get the text to scroll by fast enough – so what was the point of writing it? People don't like to read paragraphs, they like to read conversations.

"You play these games where you can't get the text to scroll by fast enough – so what was the point of it? People want to read conversations, not paragraphs"

Did you feel the impact of the mid-'90s shift to the eastern style of RPG?
Most definitely, especially on console. There were so few western RPGs coming out on console, and when they did they were trying to knock off the eastern style. I think a lot of the great western RPG minds were on PC, so there was just this void. And that's only just started to get better.

Do you think that's because of a renaissance led by Microsoft's console?
I think it's because of Xbox, and I also think because of the economics of the PC business you're getting a lot of the talent moving over, because they want to make RPGs and they also want to be able to feed their families. *KOTOR* was a great example of it, and it's what we want to do with *Bard's Tale* – no eastern developer could make this game. There are too many subtleties of the western mindset in there, just as there are Japanese titles we could never do, so it balances out. Ultimately, though, I think the western RPG will get more and more popular on console.

So what's your opinion of eastern RPGs?
Giving the player choice about how they participate in the world is the way to go. Look at *The Sims*, or *Sim City*, or Molyneux's games – it's not a win condition, it's going in and playing in them that makes the game interesting. I think the ability to change the path, to do things 'your way' is what people really want. So for that reason – although I know eastern RPGs have their fans, and I understand it – I don't like being led by the nose from one section to another, or the battle-movie-battle-movie structure. There are game mechanics and graphical payoffs eastern RPGs do that are fantastic; they just don't have to be so linear.

Were the cannings of *Torn* and *Stonekeep 2* related to the shift towards console?
Not at all. *Torn* was killed because the quality was no good, flat out, and *Stonekeep 2* was killed because the team was trying to create too much technology and it just wasn't getting anywhere. There was no macro issue with either of those titles.

Interplay sheltered a lot of RPG talent – do you think the offshoots will be less secure?
Like the 'Interplay college for RPG makers'? I don't see why they would be less secure – you go to college, you graduate, you go on to do other things. BioWare has continued to make phenomenal products that have nothing to do with Interplay. I'm curious to see what they'll come up with. And believe me, they're all curious to see what I'm going to do. [Laughs]

BioWare is now producing original titles after making its name with licences; do you see InXile following a similar model?
In some ways, *Bard's Tale* is an original title: you have licences people will buy no matter what's on the box, and clearly that's not what *Bard's Tale* is. It's an original product with a small head start.

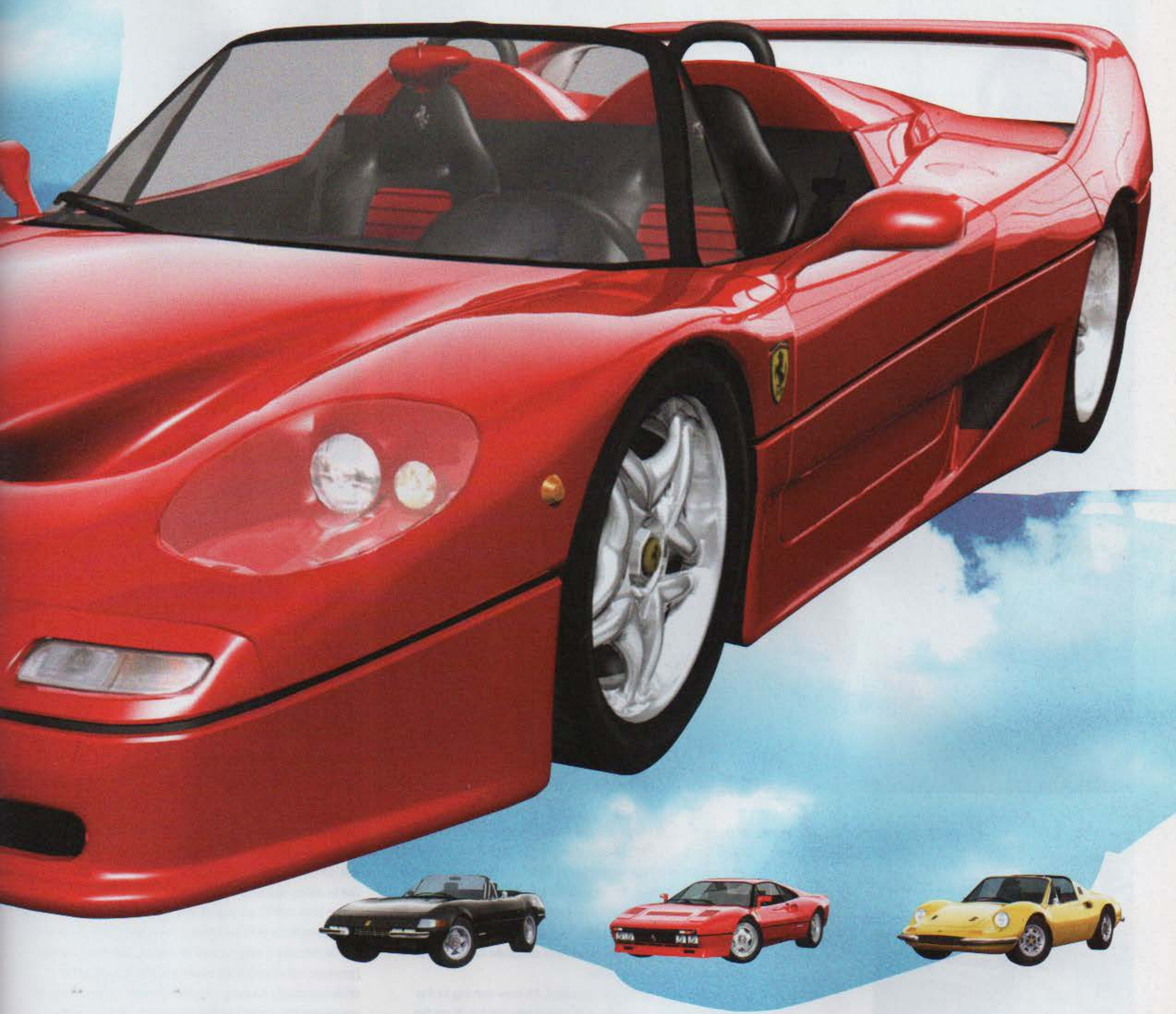
Do you think Interplay's motto – By Gamers, For Gamers – is still relevant in today's climate?
I think so, because you have a core group of opinion-makers that you have to satisfy at the same time as the mass world. All of our biggest phenomena have come out of the hardcore fanbase. The other thing is, there are people who maybe only buy one game a year, but still consider themselves gamers. So I do think it's relevant, because we're aware of that core audience, but we're also giving it some heart and some soul that the mass market will really respond to. You need to think of both worlds all the time.

So humanity is the mass market draw?
I'd put it right up there with accessibility. Accessibility is important, but all console games are accessible, so then it's the humanity.



The beautiful journey

Sega has handed over the conversion of an arcade sequel 17 years in the making to an unknown dev studio responsible for exercise bike software. Why?



We are apprehensive. We've travelled 190 miles repeatedly asking ourselves 'why?' but it's now, during the short trip between Sheffield train station and Sumo Digital, the developer given the task of converting *OutRun 2* to Xbox, that the anxiety is really mounting. (Traditionally, thirdparty translations of major coin-ops often prove bitter disappointments, let's not forget.) Eyes furiously scanning the moving scenery, any element, however absurdly tenuous, that potentially vindicates Sega's decision and soothes our (possibly visible) concern is noted. Nothing so far. But then, as we near our destination, the situation improves dramatically. The studio appears, surrounded by massive car dealerships, and, crucially, it's only a stone's throw away from a Ferrari concessionary.

Inside Sumo, things soon begin to brighten up. Sat in its meeting room (which houses a highly tempting *OutRun2* arcade unit on freeplay), we listen to the company's key personnel as they lay their credentials on the immaculate conference table. **Carl Cavers**, COO, Darren Mills, chief creative officer, and **Paul Porter**, chief technology officer, have a working relationship that spans ten years from the days of Gremlin Interactive and subsequently Infogrames, following the latter's acquisition spree at the end of the last century. Following a restructuring, the French publisher's Sheffield operation was shut down and after some goodwill negotiation between the two parties, Sumo Digital opened its doors in June last year with just nine staff members. That number has rapidly grown to 22 as the developer picked up contracts with various publishers such as THQ and Microsoft, but up until the Sega commission its major project remained the production of original software for a fitness bike company.

Work with Sega began before Christmas. Sumo was asked to come up with a concept design for how it envisaged a home version of *OutRun2*, and the team set about the challenge of turning an immediate arcade event into a substantial consumer experience. Not that the coin-op version is a weak affair. Adopting the same progressive five-route/15-stage structure of *OutRun*, Sega-AM2's long-awaited sequel fully embodies the alluring spirit of the original game while updating obvious technical issues such as visuals and handling dynamics.

Each memorable stage (themed from desert and industrial









Clockwise from main picture: Paul Porter, chief technology offic and Darren Mills, chief creative officer. Mark Glossop, project manager. Carl Cavers, COO, and senior designer Sean Milliard





Other road users change lanes randomly (although they are courteous enough to indicate), and can occasionally slam their brakes on if you're tailing them just to add a little extra spice to the action

settings to castle-lined, cobble-paved streets, to name just three) has been meticulously designed to exploit the game's extravagant powerslide mechanic, which encourages some of videogaming's most fabulous drifts. We challenge anyone not to smile the first time they slide around a corner in the Enzo, in cockpit view, with full opposite lock on and the scenery rushing past horizontally. It's one of the most exquisite experiences currently available in arcades.

And, from what we have played, it's now coming to the living room. "Our main aim is to absolutely get it to fit on the Xbox without compromising the level of quality whatsoever," Cavers had boasted before we had the chance to see Sumo's work. Typical developer exaggeration, you'd think, but having come straight off the coin-op and been handed a joypad, we find ourselves powersliding through a virtually indistinguishable conversion of the Chihiro-powered *OutRun 2* running on Microsoft's similarly powered console. The same impressive speed, the same vivid and detailed levels, the same beautiful automotive selection from Maranello's renowned supercar maker – it's all here.

If concessions have been made, they're not immediately identifiable (we did wonder about a possible reduction in the number of background windsurfers on the first stage, but frankly it's not something you have time to notice when slicing through civilian traffic in a Ferrari). "We got full access to all th original assets from AM2," explains Cavers. "The guys have just come back from a meeting with AM2, actually – they wer out in Japan last week. So by maintaining the relationship tha we've built with Sega Japan and AM2 we've managed to get everything from AM2's original archive and get it all running."

Technically, it hasn't been an entirely painless process, however, with the Chihiro board's higher specification understandably causing a few headaches when it came to squeezing the game into the constraints of a console. "[We've had to] optimise memory usage and ensure we're making the best use of what's there without affecting the quality," Porter explains.

"It's really just a case of looking how the code has been structured and reworking bits of it to fit around the Xbox architecture rather than the Chihiro. The arcade board has essentially got twice the memory that the Xbox has… and most of that was used. What we've achieved so far we're really, really happy with."

This includes the translation of the handling, perhaps the most crucial aspect of the operation. Unlike the PS2 and GC, the Xbox is still, two years after its launch, in the embarrassin position of finding itself without an 'official' force feedback steering wheel, which essentially forces players to default to









Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **Sumo/AM2**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **TBC**



Every play option from the arcade is present: normal OutRun mode, Heart Attack (complete challenges and capture the heart of your female companion), and Time Attack (no traffic and online ranking for best times). Not satisfied with this, Sumo is promising additional features



OutRun: the legend

By far the most stylish thing to emerge in 1986, *OutRun* dazzled players with its exquisite audio-visual mix. The speed at which its vibrant, colourful stages moved on screen left rival coin-ops standing, the sense of achievement from reaching one of the five finish lines was extreme, and to this day no one has managed to compose a better racing soundtrack. *OutRun* is special. How special? Well, one of our slower acquaintances has only just recently realised that the game operates a low/high gear mechanic, thus finally explaining why he has never managed to get past the first stage. Yet this hasn't put him off persevering with the game during arcade visits over the years. It's hardly surprising – *OutRun* is the embodiment of the perfect arcade experience, offering a magnificent mechanic underpinned by an unsurpassed balance of design and it remains, even now, one of the most satisfying racing videogames in existence.




TULIP GARDEN
CLOUDY HIGHLAND
CASTLE WALL
METROPOLIS
DEEP LAKE
INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX
PALM BEACH
CONIFEROUS FOREST
ANCIENT RUINS
ALPINE
SNOW MOUNTAIN
DESERT
IMPERIAL AVENUE
GHOST FOREST
CAPE WAY



joypad usage. Initially this feels awkward, our F40 slamming into every available barrier and turn-in feeling heavier and less immediate than that of the arcade version. A few more plays, and things improve drastically – so much so that previously treacherous chicanes are conquered with a quick off-on-off-on throttle sequence as the back-end elegantly snakes its way through, while the arguable turn-in deficiency is quickly remedied by a touch of extra braking to deliberately unsettle the car into corners.

One of the most appealing aspects of *OutRun 2*'s handling is the way experienced players can play around with their line through a bend via the accelerator in order to still be able to negotiate traffic without breaking from a powerslide. If anything, the shoulder triggers on the Xbox pad make this more manageable by offering additional levels of control, which could possibly be attributed to a player's conventional use of fingers over feet. Regardless, it soon feels impressively intuitive. "Obviously we're doing quite a lot of work on the handling to make it work as far as the joypad's concerned and also as far as the longevity of the game is concerned," Porter admits. "We're making sure that you can't just pick it up, powerslide easily and complete the game very quickly, so we're doing a lot of work with AM2 as well to make sure the handling is right for the joypad, and is how they envisage it working as well."

Given the current quality of the conversion, *OutRun 2*'s original developer is unlikely to complain. Every element of the coin-op has been skilfully integrated, including the Heart Attack mode. In this, you travel the same courses as in the normal mode, but you're set tasks by your female passenger that must be completed to her satisfaction. For instance, she may want you to overtake as many cars as you can within a set distance, or fancy some wild powerslide action – the faster, and more acute the angle of the drift, the more hearts you collect. Hearts mean grades and finishing a stage with an 'A' average brings on additional tasks of increasing complexity. It's compelling stuff, and the option most OutRunners end up spending more time on once the normal mode is completed.

But for the home version, Sumo has some additional elements in store. "We want to achieve a product that is seen



Right now, this is as close a coin-op conversion as you could hope for, with all of the arcade's elements already in place (including the four views) and the same tight, exhilarating gameplay

Q&A: Makoto Osaki PRODUCER, OUTRUN 2 (ARCADE), SEGA-AM2

Traditionally, sequels to successful games tend to appear quite rapidly, but *OutRun* waited 17 years for a genuine arcade follow-up. Why has it taken so long?
Why has there been this time gap? That is a very difficult question. I'd say that the following items applied: we wanted to be able to live up to a great legacy in *OutRun*, and it's only now we felt we could. There were two main considerations we needed to get right to create a worthy sequel. First, the game is a one-way stage-based (non-closed circuit) game which is a challenge to implement on polygon-based hardware. Also, we realised that in order to carry the *OutRun* name, the breathtaking background beauty was essential, which raised the bar even higher.

So what were your ambitions when starting the sequel?
The first *OutRun* was very well regarded. We wanted this game to inherit the kind of engaging gameplay that *OutRun* is known for, and to improve on areas we felt we weren't able to maximise at the time due to the technology.

What did you view as the biggest challenge when making *OutRun 2*?
The realisation that we were producing the sequel to a great title made its development hard. Additionally, after a time gap of as long as 17 years, the original title has achieved legendary status. It was a daunting prospect to develop a title that would stand up as its sequel.

How do you explain the universal attraction of *OutRun*, which even 17 years after its release continues to be one of the most endearing racing games around?
I suppose the reason would be that the navigation of race courses and challenging rival cars are built upon a delicate balance. Moreover, I feel that the player is rewarded with the beauty of graphics that are still fantastic, even after you see them several times. You can also hear wonderful tunes longer if you win challenges, paired with beautiful courses.

Obviously technology has improved graphics and handling dynamics, but has the racing game genre evolved (in a thematic sense) the way you expected it to? Are you disappointed at the current general state of racing games?
Even though it seems the racing game genre has evolved in various ways from *Monaco GP* to *Gran Turismo*, its essence has not changed that much at all. In these games, you will get ahead of rival cars and drive the car so as not to make it crash into the wall or other cars, or take on various challenges in order to achieve the best lap time and keep achieving first place to win the championship.

When we look at the long history of the genre, at least two of these elements are featured in every title. The realistic settings of the car models and the feeling of 'being there' in relation to improvements in camera work characterise the general evolution of racing games. Recent games are getting to grips with real-world settings to a large degree.

Players will naturally be pleased with realistic cars and settings, rather than imaginary ones. It's like with the use of Delta Force, Navy Seals and SAS teams in war-based firstperson shooters rather than using fictional armies – it's a logical direction.

I believe that the genre's improvement through realistic gameplay is not the result of personal 'innovation', but rather through improved graphical performance. This is an area that is in line with the players' expectations and is the reason why the genre is still popular today. If I look at the current situation of the genre from a player's perspective, I'm not disappointed at all. I'm looking forward to *GT4*! As a developer, I feel that the focus has positively shifted to a desire to create a game that you can play for a long time, not just by preparing lots of courses and cars, and to carry that idea to execution. If we could release such a game at this point, I'm sure it would appear innovative without doubt, and it would probably cost less to develop the title. Possibly, I feel like the last 'Xanadu' of the car racing game still remains. This is almost my instinct, but I have this strange confidence, nonetheless.



Q&A: Matthew Woodley

EUROPEAN MARKETING DIRECTOR, SEGA

Previously, Sega Europe had played down the chances of a conversion of *OutRun 2* for the home market. What made you change your mind?

We didn't change our minds on this one. Sometimes we just need to keep the lid on certain projects whilst we make 100 per cent certain that we can produce the best game possible – we knew from the outset that we'd need to add much more to the game to make it a viable home console proposition, and it's taken us this long to be confident that we'll be able to do the conversion justice.

***OutRun* remains one of the more popular racing games of all time, but its heritage may be lost on the latest generation of players. How are you planning to ensure that *OutRun 2* doesn't pass by this demographic unnoticed?**

We really believe that even if you haven't heard of or played the original *OutRun* that if you get a chance to see and play *OutRun 2* you will immediately enjoy the experience. It's such a simple proposition – beautiful environments, sun, Ferraris and pretty girls – that we think new gamers will be interested to pay a visit. We'll use these hooks in our marketing activity for sure. *OutRun 2* is a great place to visit. The sceenshots alone are incredibly inviting – then when you see the game move it's pretty awesome.

Could you explain your decision to hand the project over to Sumo, as opposed to perhaps a more established choice?

We looked into many factors when we chose the team for the Xbox version of *OutRun 2*. Any team we chose had to meet certain criteria: passion for the product, technical brilliance, and tight project management.

Sumo delivered an all these points to the highest degree. I think you would agree that most developers would jump at the chance of working on *OutRun 2* but Sumo showed a blinding passion to make a game that fits within Sega's design criteria that the company overshadowed all the other teams we looked at. Their technical know-how was unsurpassed and they have a high degree of Live experience. Live was an aspect of the Xbox version that we identified as being critical to the product but also the biggest potential technological risk. Sega Europe spent a long time making the decision to make an Xbox version of *OutRun 2* and Sumo has showed us that we have made the right decision.

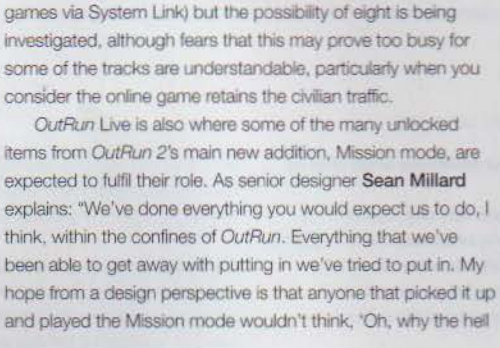


OutRun fans' ears will be delighted by the aural pleasure of Passing Breeze, Splash Wave and Magical Sound Shower. Sadly, *OutRun 2*'s tracks (Life Was A Bore, Night Flight, Shiny World, Risky Ride) can't hope to produce the same effect, but there will be extra music for Xbox players

as *OutRun 2* but not a direct conversion of the arcade machine in that it has the longevity for a console product and therefore is as prestigious on the console as it is on the arcade," outlines Mills. Most obvious is the implementation of Live compatibility, which promises score uploading and ghost downloading while also permitting online play.

Currently, fourplayer games exist (indeed, we joined members of the development team in a few competitive games via System Link) but the possibility of eight is being investigated, although fears that this may prove too busy for some of the tracks are understandable, particularly when you consider the online game retains the civilian traffic.

OutRun Live is also where some of the many unlocked items from *OutRun 2*'s main new addition, Mission mode, are expected to fulfil their role. As senior designer **Sean Millard** explains: "We've done everything you would expect us to do, I think, within the confines of *OutRun*. Everything that we've been able to get away with putting in we've tried to put in. My hope from a design perspective is that anyone that picked it up and played the Mission mode wouldn't think, 'Oh, why the hell haven't they done this?' or 'Why the hell haven't they done that?'" Sumo and Sega are currently keeping the exact details of this mode under the bonnet, but they have confirmed that it will feature in excess of 50 missions consisting of Heart Attack-style challenges, marathon routes and AI character challenges (which include both AI-controlled Ferraris and specific enemy AI characters).



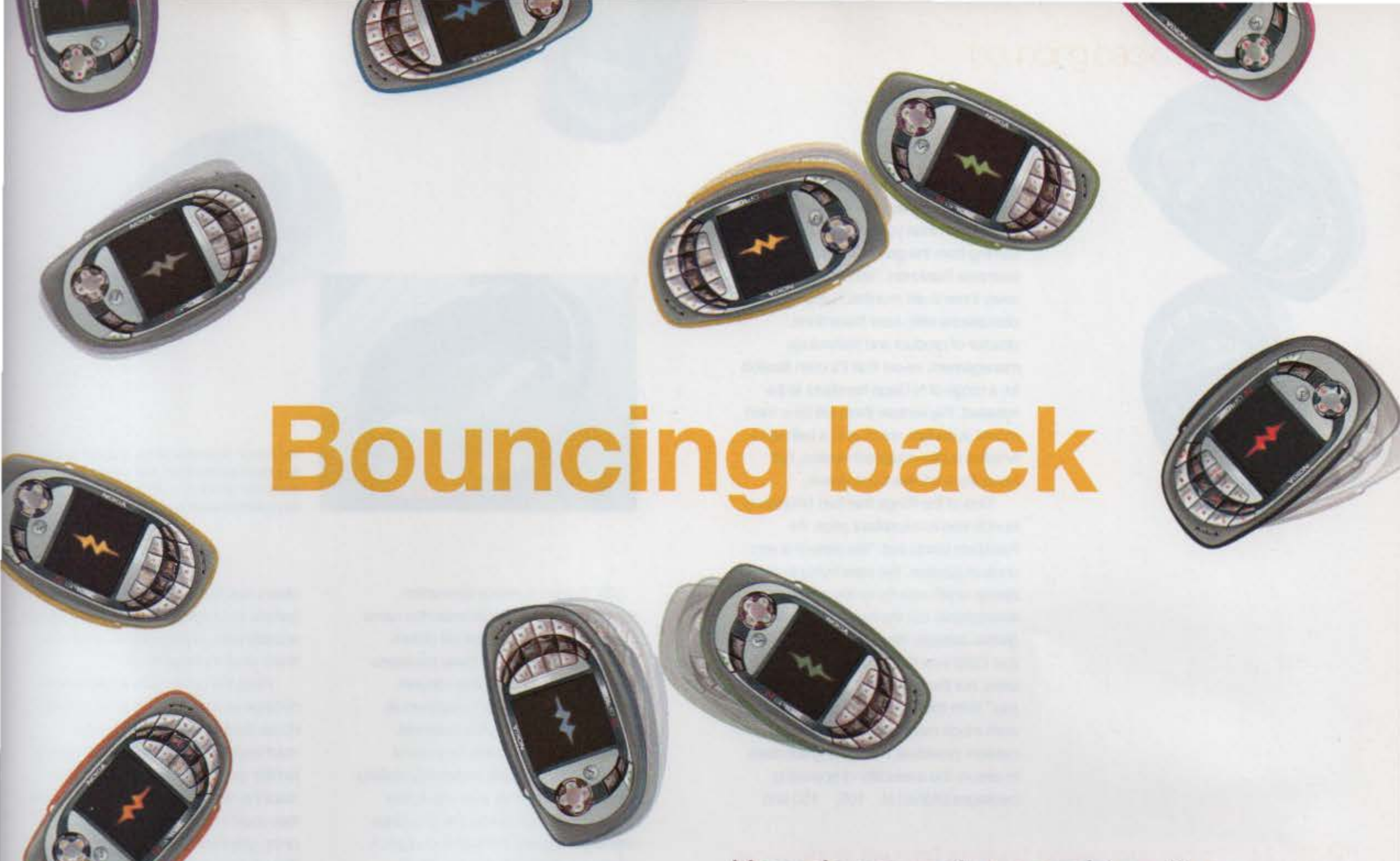
As you'd expect, the arcade version's cars (365GTS/4, Dino, Testarossa, 288GTO, F40, F50, 360 Spider and Enzo) have all made the conversion, but expect additional models in the Xbox game

"There's plenty of challenges that require the opponent cars to act in different ways to what they do in standard OutRun mode," Millard reveals. "They'll try and block you more, they get more difficult as the game progresses and they become more intelligent and try and do everything they can to beat you that they wouldn't do normally." Also, as part of the unlockable features promised, expect some of these to feature extra tracks, more music and additional cars, including the prospect of tuned Ferraris.

Sumo is keen to maintain that this is not simply the recycling of existing components. "It isn't just stuff you've seen before," insists Millard. "Where we've been able to we've tried to bring a new mechanic to the experience and Sega has been very accommodating with that. From a design perspective, I'm really pleased with the amount of variety we've managed to get in. I was worried at first that it would just feel like an add-on mode, but it does feel like a principal singleplayer mode.

"One thing you don't realise about *OutRun* is that we think of it as race game and Sega Japan's actual definition of it is that it's 'a beautiful journey'. And that's something we've tried to enhance – it's not just about racing someone, there's more stuff to do than just race and do the standard tasks. There are a few extras. I'm confident fans of *OutRun* will be pleased with what we've done."

Based on current form, there's no reason to doubt him. Indeed, Sumo's apparent ability to handle such a prestigious project as competently as you'd expect Sega's own in-house team to will be of great reassurance to the game's many followers. We leave Sumo in a far more relaxed mood than when we arrived.



Bouncing back

How do you solve a problem like Nokia's N-Gage? We visited the company's Helsinki HQ to find out



Did anything go right? Other than accomplishing the first co-ordinated global console launch, Nokia had little to crow about with its N-Gage. The machine's design was pilloried; the games classed as car crashes at worst and competent ports at best; elements of the advertising campaign were banned; and N-Gage's 'online gaming' capabilities were revealed to be a shadow of the original promises. "The execution," **Ilkka Raiskinen**, senior vice president of games, admits, "has not been good."

It's easy, then, to chalk N-Gage up as a failure, but that wouldn't be fair. There are all sorts of reasons why not, but here's the most important one: N-Gage isn't a game console. Or rather, before we're trampled by a stampede of enraged Nokia PRs, it isn't a game console as we know them. It's this fact that changes all the rules: the rules about business models, the rules about game development, the rules about console launches. For a conventional game console, with a vast development budget and a projected five-year life cycle, a start like N-Gage's would be fatal. For a mobile phone company, there's nothing more straightforward than superseding an unpopular model with a better bet. Which is why it will have come as a surprise to very few when we announced the arrival of N-Gage QD last issue. N-Gage is dead. Long live N-Gage. (As they say.)

The QD is a Cinderella machine, made to look much more beautiful by the ugly older sister it stands next to. There's no question, however, that Nokia has faithfully ticked off the list of criticisms made of its sibling. The handset itself is smaller, neater, heftier. Side-talking is out, slot-loading is in. The look is overhauled, rounder and rubberier than the dated silvering of the original. Most encouraging is the replaceable fascia: almost all of the design elements – the rubber strip, buttons, D-pad and framers – are interchangeable, opening up all sorts of game-specific possibilities. The price for all this is the loss of the phone's audio capabilities – no radio, no built-in MP3 support. It's a very worthwhile trade.

However, perhaps the most important thing about the QD is that it won't be the last N-Gage. N-Gage 2 is still some way off, and between now and then there's





scope for Nokia to continue refining the design. You can expect new iterations "more often than you would expect coming from the games industry," promises Raiskinen, "although not quite every three to six months." Later discussions with Jussi Nevanlinna, director of product and technology management, reveal that it's even feasible for a range of N-Gage handsets to be released. We venture there will be a main model, a budget option and a bells-and-whistles audio-equipped version, but Nevanlinna refuses to be drawn.

One of the things that hurt N-Gage at launch was its exorbitant price. As Raiskinen points out: "We were in a very unusual position. We were trying to sell a device which was by far the cheapest smartphone, but the most expensive games console. We failed to communicate that £299 was the worst-case-scenario price, not the price most people would pay." With the QD, Nokia has decided to work much more aggressively with network providers, hammering out deals to ensure the availability of appealing packages pitched at 100, 150 and 200. Current currency convention suggests that this would mean the same figures in GB pounds and US dollars.

"With N-Gage we were trying to sell a device which was by far the cheapest smartphone, but the most expensive games console"





Fat boy, thin

Nokia already has usage data which shows that N-Gage owners spend a large proportion of their game time with 'thin' Java-based titles they could run on lower-spec units. Rather than forcing people towards expensive, 'fat' MMC-based games, Nokia is happy to encourage this. The idea is to promote N-Gage to keen Java gamers as a device more ergonomically suited to their gaming habits, and to use the MMC games and online capabilities of the fat games to test out features for the thin games of the future.





The 'click' function of the original D-pad has been abandoned and set to a separate 'confirm' button, making menu navigation easier and accident-proof

One of the reasons these packages should be appealing is that network providers need the QD to succeed as much as Nokia does. The voice call market is nearly saturated in most of Europe – most people are already making as many calls as they ever will. A new revenue stream is needed, and N-Gage, online gaming and the GRPS charges it incurs can provide it. It's what **Paul Whitaker**, N-Gage Arena manager, calls "the great ARPU story." ARPU – please, no tittering – stands for Average Revenue Per User, and increasing this number is the golden goose for all network providers. "The N-Gage," elaborates Whitaker, "allows providers to offer GPRS packages, gamer packages which don't cannibalise existing markets. It's a whole new revenue stream."

The key to N-Gage success

And this is where the wheel that could drive N-Gage success starts to become visible. For the platform to succeed, it needs to be priced competitively and promoted effectively. For that to happen, network providers have to be behind it. For that to happen, Nokia has to be able to promise lucrative GPRS activity from N-Gage users. For that to happen, Nokia clearly has to deliver not just fully online games, but fully online games that people actually want to play. And up until now, that's what it's failed to do.

From the outset, Nokia positioned N-Gage as a competitor to dedicated home consoles. By talking up the machine's specifications and by signing familiar gaming brands, it pitched the machine head to head against platforms that could overpower it in every field – price, graphics, audio and ergonomics. The one clear differential, the permanently online nature of the N-Gage unit, was something Nokia was simply unable to use as leverage on uncertain consumers due to difficulties in implementing true online play over the network. The failings weren't all Nokia's – **Toni Verhiä**, game producer for Nokia's firstparty titles, says sternly: "Remember, the network is not in Nokia's hands. It's just made up of what hundreds and thousands of operators have created along the years." But the results were damaging: online gaming was limited to high-score tables and downloadable ghosts.

Nokia is quick to accept that early N-Gage titles didn't show the machine's true potential. **Pasi Pölönen**, director of game publishing, argues that N-Gage is already hosting its third generation of software. "With the first generation," he says, "we were still learning about the

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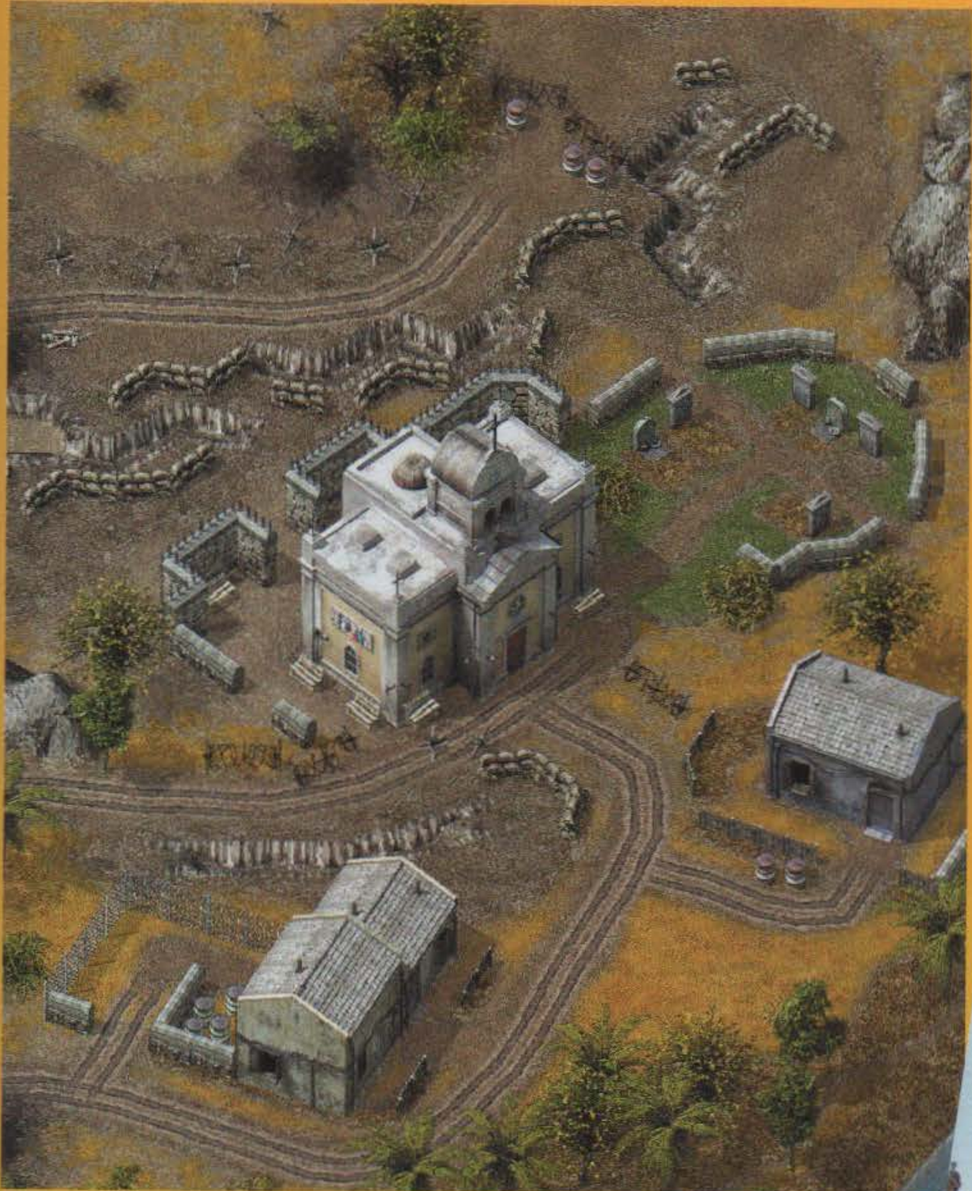
Along with built-in MP3 playback, stereo sound has been lost with QD. But N-Gage games have always used mono audio, so it's hardly a big deal





Pathway To Glory

Nokia ■ Release: Q4 2004



N-Gage games come on MMC cards, and MMC cards are tiny. Just because you understand the technology behind them doesn't mean your mind doesn't reel as you listen to what *Pathway To Glory*'s producers intend to squeeze on to these tiny shards.

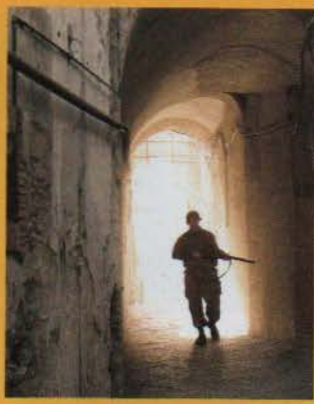
Pathway is a WWII-set turn-based strategy game. So far, so conventional. It will feature a singleplayer campaign, 'hot-seat' multiplay (where you pass around a single N-Gage), fourplayer Bluetooth matches and massed online battles. It aims to be deep enough to satisfy experienced TBS fans, but remain welcoming to newcomers through a unique ranking system, which only rewards co-operative players. Rather than tiny iconic sprites, the units you control are distinct individuals whose rank and skills develop with each mission they complete. Once killed, these hardened individuals are lost forever, replaced by shaky newbies in a clever RPG twist on an old formula. Units left with any points not used up through moving or firing will use them to defend themselves once their turn is over – automatically and intelligently. Translating TBS to consoles has always proved taxing, but Nokia's team has done a thorough and imaginative job.

The team has invested an endearingly serious amount of effort into the visual aspect of the package, even to the extent of motion capturing the tiny figures who do your bidding. The detail apparent in the settings isn't simply cosmetic, however. Obstacles block your way, requiring you to spend more points to move around. Buildings become transparent as you enter them, and their architecture has a real impact on your tactics – stray too close to the windows and you'll be more vulnerable to enemy fire. Vehicles can be commandeered, and the isometric 3D terrain can be used for height advantage.

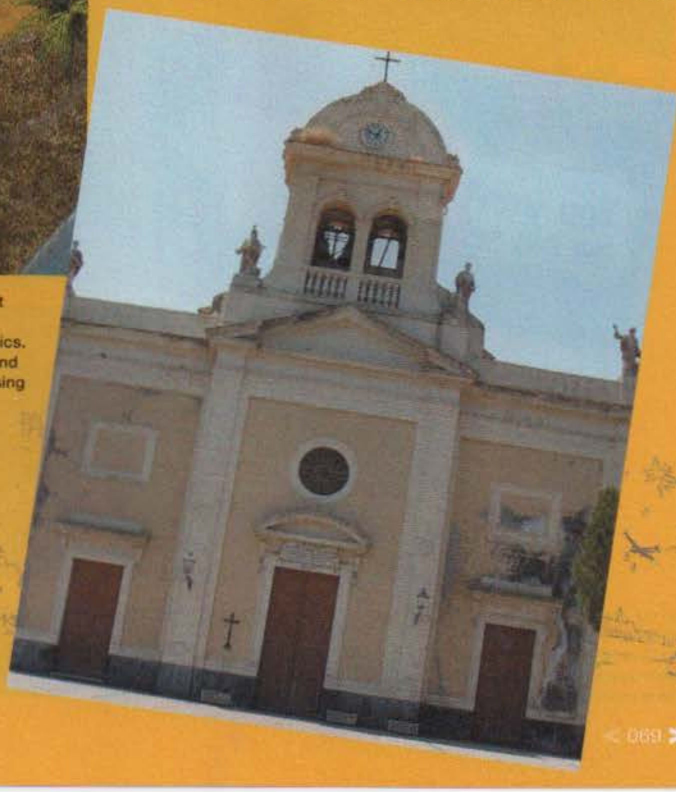
Until Nokia announces its full intentions for *Pathway To Glory* at E3, it's hard to gauge how massively online the game will be. For now, the developer certainly wasn't willing to rule out the possibility of epic games, hosted by Nokia, running for days and nights at a time, while players drop in and out of the ongoing battle.

There are a number of concerns. The game is complex and intended to be played at an unforgiving pace. Although timing can be altered, it may prove off-puttingly stressful at first. There is also the question of whether or not the hardware's screen will cope with conveying the amount of aesthetic detail and tactical information the game requires. If these concerns prove unfounded, and if the balance at the core of the TBS is sound, then *Pathway To Glory* won't be just a great N-Gage game, it'll be a great game full stop.





This large environment shot is an accurate sample of *Pathway*'s on-screen graphics. Once overlayed with men and icons it can become confusing







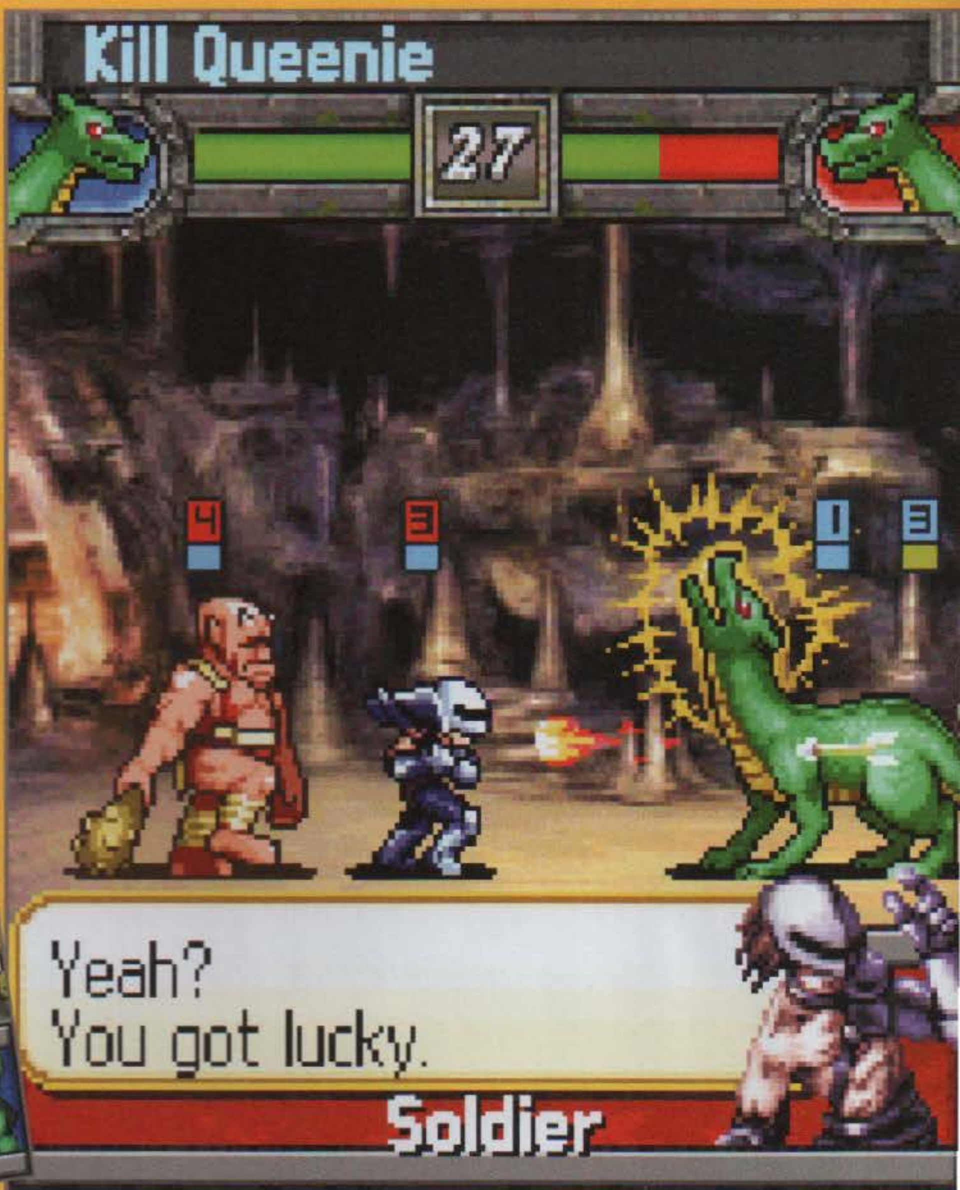
Pocket Kingdoms: Own The World

Sega ■ Release: autumn 2004

What kind of games keep you at the top of the handheld market? Small screens favour bold character design, low resolutions encourage bright colours, and digital controls best suit 2D game presentation. It's an equation that adds up to the kind of games that handheld supremo Nintendo excels at, and to the kind of games Nokia has been deliberately shunning in an effort to position N-Gage as a 'serious' gaming device.

Happily, *Pocket Kingdoms* signals a very sensible change of heart. Developed by Sega, it's the world's first mobile MMORPG, and N-Gage's first vibrant eye-catcher. Featuring co-operative dungeon sections, *Pocket Kingdoms* centres on the construction and defence of your castle. Built from a range of 400 combining parts, each player's castle is their base within the game. Battles will rage and flow within the persistent world, so it's necessary to build up a range of offensive and defensive units and barrack them in your castle to protect it in your absence.

Pocket Kingdoms should be the first game to drive home N-Gage's USP, finally making the machine feel like the world's first permanently online, permanently in your pocket console. So, no matter how serious the meeting you were in, would you really be able to resist the lure of a text message warning that your castle was under attack?













So far, the only thing to put us off *Pocket Kingdoms* is the tired trash-talking. Hopefully once the game goes live things will get more creatively chaotic





platform. The second was about learning how best to use Bluetooth. Now, with the third, we're learning about online connectivity." The company's first step in implementing this third generation was to overhaul Nokia Arena, the service that supports online play. Accessible both through the N-Gage QD's main menu, from within games and over the internet, the new Arena will enable the functions – friends lists, messaging, matchmaking – that gamers have come to expect. There's no question that it's been inspired by Xbox Live. Much later in the day, one N-Gage designer confesses why he's such a big fan of Microsoft's service. "It's very useful," he whispers. "I can research what people think about the N-Gage while I play."

N-Gage games: the future

So, with the hardware improved, and the backbone established, the question becomes whether Nokia can supply the software to fuel N-Gage's success. The list of new thirdparty big hitters – *The Sims Bustin' Out*, *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004* and *Crash Nitro Kart* – seems to do little to break the mould of PS2 wannabes. This doesn't bother Pölönen, who is confident that Nokia's firstparty titles will deliver. "It's the role of traditional publishers to take the safe side," he states. "It's the manufacturers' job to take risks." It's an attitude some manufacturers are unwilling to share, due to the possibilities of failures. Pölönen is laudably phlegmatic. "Unless you do a miss now and then, then you're not pushing the envelope," he shrugs. If pursued, it's a policy which could lead to Nokia funding development of properly groundbreaking mobile games.

So, will the QD 'do a miss'? Its fate rests substantially in the hands of the three real third-generation N-Gage titles: *Ashen*, *Pocket Kingdoms* and *Pathway To Glory*, which are previewed over these pages. N-Gage took a fall at launch, but the argument goes that the further you fall the higher you bounce back. Nokia has made it plain how committed it is to accomplishing just that – why else would the company have designed the QD with a fat rubber bumper?

The best N-Gage game never made

Sega's *Typing Of The Dead* was an unrivalled mix of surreal poetry and tendon-tangling tension. Normally, 'unrivalled' is lazy videogame magazine code for 'one of the better examples of…', but *Typing Of The Dead* really had no competitors. An FPS typing tutor inspired by The X-Files, it could be perfectly updated for the txting generation and might run very smoothly indeed on the *Ashen* engine.







Ashen

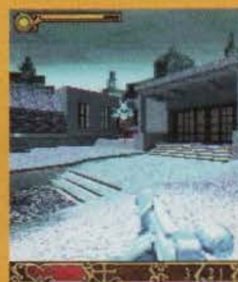
Torus Games ■ Release: June 4

Remarkable and regrettable, *Ashen* is a highly accomplished FPS. The plot is a fairly predictable mix of survival horror hokum, the setting a convenient warren of sewers, corridors and galleried halls.

At first, *Ashen* is arresting. Smooth and detailed, the environments have an impressive sense of solidity and history. Controls are sensibly distributed – turn on the D-pad, strafe on the keypad – and the weapons have a reasonable sense of heft. The level design is creative, and the grotesque enemies respond with speed and clockwork cunning.

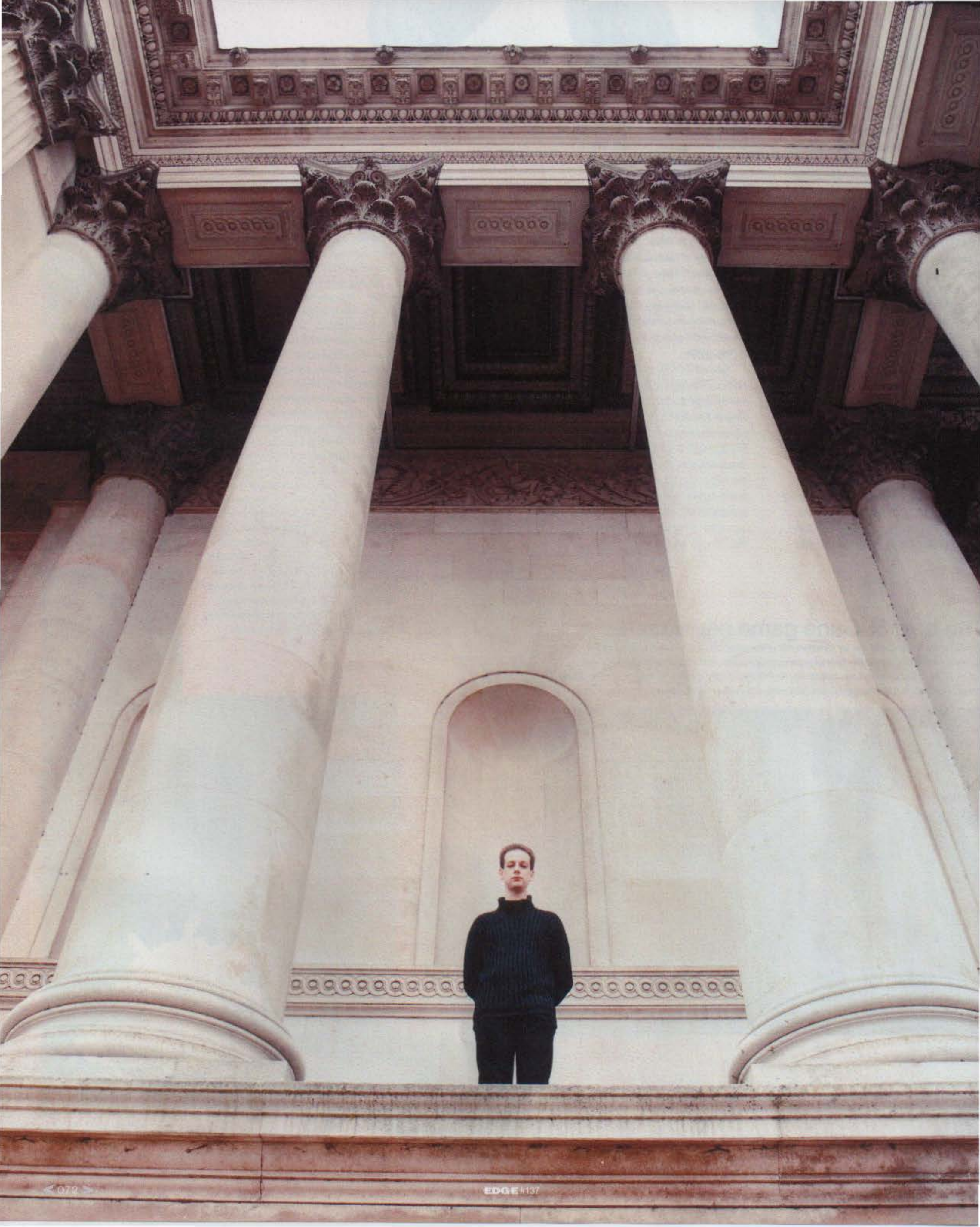
The regret comes when you realise that there's probably no genre which exposes the frailties of a control system as mercilessly as an FPS. The first time you're attacked from behind will leave you tapping backwards and forwards, trying to coax enough precision from the keys as you wheel round. Once caught in enemy fire, struggles with the keys become compounded by the frustrations of the small, reflective screen – a situation the QD's brighter display and clickier buttons should improve.

Complete with twin pistols and cool blue ghost vision goggles, *Ashen* offers a decent singleplayer adventure, with the possibility of Bluetooth fourplayer deathmatches. It may, however, be hard to shake the impression that you're playing a five-year-old PC game.



Ashen's monsters are excellently designed, and will pursue you energetically, if erratically. The deserted town is spooky enough even before you encounter them, and exploration feels natural and unrestrained



ZOOLOOK

From GoldenEye to Perfect Dark to… rhythm-action? That's the Zoonami story to date. We meet with founder Martin Hollis to discover exactly what's been going on

Let **Martin Hollis** introduce *Funkydilla*, or at least try to. "It's a music game." OK. "It takes the music genre in a totally new direction." Right. How so? "All previous music games are follow the leader. They play something, and you're supposed to match it. This is new. It's about freedom, about choice – you choose the direction you want to take the piece in." And that's all he says, because the easiest way to explain *Funkydilla* is to play it, which is what we do; and that leaves us with the more difficult task of describing that experience to you.

Funkydilla is a music game, but on first impressions it looks rather more like a music sequencing program, one of the raft of PlayStation titles that allow you to sequence samples to a number of tracks using coloured bars. It is not a sequencing program. It is a music game, which uses a single button as its method of input, and takes gameplay cues from sequencing software, standard rhythm-action games like *Frequency* or *PaRappa* and, most intriguingly, line-clearing puzzle games.

The vertical playfield represents a looped musical score, building up with sequencer-style coloured bars from the bottom. Different coloured bars represent different instruments, so the blue bar may be the vocal track, while the red may be the bassline. A metronome keeps time, passing over the score from left to right. Bars are punctuated with dots in staccato, *Parappa*-style patterns, and matching those patterns as the metronome passes over them plays the instrument in that bar and clears it. If the rhythm is broken, the instrument will not play, the bar will not disappear, and the player will have to wait for the metronome to make another pass to try again. Meanwhile, the bars continue to stack up from the bottom of the screen, and if the stack reaches the top, the game is over.

With us so far? Here's the tricky bit: since the bars are vertically stacked, clumps can be eliminated at once by combining the rhythms of several bars at once. Like all rhythm-action games, it's confusing at first – but understanding how to succeed becomes a question of learning the game's notation. Once you realise how *Funkydilla* is representing the sound, reinterpreting that sound through the joypad becomes second nature. Unlike other rhythm-action games, the sounds that come out are essentially of your own design, perfectly matched to your input. Or, to put it in terms of other games: *Gitarooman* switches between a success soundtrack and a failure soundtrack depending on how you're doing. *Frequency* and *Amplitude* play whichever bars you choose, whenever you choose to start them. In *Funkydilla* you can construct the song note by note, instrument by instrument, or you can cut great swathes of sound through the score with combos. Clever stuff.

Or, to use Hollis' own words and hand actions: "Most music games are this much choice" – his thumb and forefinger are together – "*Frequency* is this much choice" – now they're apart a fraction – "And we're this much." Hollis spreads his arms wide. "We're very excited about the game – that's why we're showing it now – it's going to reinvent the music game genre."

And it's going to do that using a single button. Any of the inputs on whatever device you're using to control the game (we used a Dual Shock, though the code was running on a Cube development kit, a result of Zoonami and Nintendo's (zealous) mutual appreciation) can be used to try to hit the beats as they pass beneath the ticker – and *Funkydilla* experts will ultimately find themselves using one button with their left hand, one with their right as they try to match some of the ludicrously fast rhythm combinations. **Richard Tucker**, *Funkydilla*'s conceptualist, explains the team's methodology:

"We tried many things. One of the guiding principles was to be able to play things simultaneously. One button can play any number of rows simultaneously, but for a while we experimented with playing the music simultaneously using, as it were, chords – multiple button combinations – but it's just too hard. By having a really simple control system, that's how you make available the complexity that comes later. For a long time we thought it was madness having a single button control system. I'd come in every day and think, 'Maybe we could use another button for this,' and invent some new concept, but all the ideas were rubbish."

In full flight, beats matched and bars dropping away, *Funkydilla* has the spirit of classic zone games about it – you can't bring yourself to breathe, much less glance from the screen, lest you miss the four-line combo that'll clear the screen for another second of safety. The game's nature is less *Frequency*, more *Tetris*; perhaps that's because while Harmonix's works let the game lead you, seeing mental effort as a distraction from pure rhythm, *Funkydilla*'s constantly changing playfield has the player thinking as well as following, missing beats and searching for new opportunities. Multiplayer exists in both co-op and a versus form similar to puzzle games – successfully hit bars shift into blocks on your opponent's screen, combos increase the damage. It's expected there'll be a chillout mode, along with licensed tracks, stripped down and reconfigured according to Zoonami's art. Sounds like fun.

Continued

Q&A: MARTIN HOLLIS

Six years ago, Rare's Martin Hollis dropped out of Twycross and off the UK game development radar. His last words to us: whatever happened, we'd be the first magazine to hear about his next project. Now he's ready to talk.

You were at Rare, then nothing for six years. Now you're here. What happened?
I worked on *Perfect Dark* for 14 months, and then my contract was up. It was time to move on. All the management was in place, and there wasn't really room for me to move up.

That's really why you left?
In all honesty, yes. I'd like to have stayed. After I left, I took a break. Went round the world, Asia mostly – it was amazing, life changing – then I wanted to get back into games. I was headhunted by NTD, a research lab in Washington. They were in charge of GameCube development, and my responsibilities there were to help steer development of the platform.

And how did that work out?
It was amazing work, and incredibly talented people were there as well. And they're still there, working on N5. But in the end I had to say that hardware wasn't what I wanted to do, I wanted to make games, and so I came back to England to set up Zoonami at the end of 1999.

So, you've got this new development studio, you want to make games, you're all set up in Cambridge. What do you do? Your first week, what did you do?
I guess it's difficult. You can do anything at all, and it's very important not to succumb to option paralysis. So the first thing is concepts, that's absolutely the first thing. So right from the beginning we were taking a long-term view; we wanted to do the most original games possible, but it has to be games that are really gonna sell. We're not interested in incredibly innovative games that won't sell – they've gotta be a big success. Since then, and still today, we have an incubator system. We sketch concepts, a lot of concepts. You've got to be ruthless, so you throw away 99 per cent of them and develop the good ones. And that's how *Funkydilla* came to be. It was Richard Tucker's idea, it sounded like it would be fun, we built a development prototype, and it was excellent.

How long does it take you to develop a prototype?
You start off with one or two people, because you have to minimise the risk, and you want to grow the project at a reasonable rate. So even if you have, say, one person on it, all their time, with that level of attention you make cautious process. It's probably be going to be four months before you have anything that you can have fun with, use as proof of concept. *Funkydilla* is now at what we call 'prototype plus,' and that's about a year's work. In fact, it's probably exactly a year.

How many people work here?
There are seven people in the core team, then a number of contractors that we maintain relationships with, because that's the way the business is going.

So, between 1999 and 2003 you were just prototyping various concepts?
We've got a bunch of projects in development. Most of them I can't talk about for competitive reasons, but *Funkydilla* we're ready to talk about because it's at that stage. It's of sufficient quality to go out... The other stuff I can't talk about, because we take a very long-term view on our projects.

Would you even like to say how many projects you've got in development right now?
To be honest it's very difficult. We have two we're very serious about, a third that we're thinking about a lot, and then there are a lot of other ideas on the list.

"DEVELOPERS GET BY WITH GAMES THAT SELL 100,000 OR 1,000,000. THAT'S NOT A BUSINESS I WANT TO BE IN"

It's a tough climate for developers at the moment.
Yep, particularly for those in the UK. It's brutal. And I think it's going to be worse in 2004 for most people.

Which is obviously why developing something that's successful is so important.
Developers get by, somehow they get by, making games that sell 100,000 or 1,000,000. I don't know how they do it, and it's not a business I want to be in.

So how many do you want *Funkydilla* to sell?
Ten million. That's the sweet spot, really.

So you want to make these games that are innovative, but then you're tempering that with commercial reality...
Well, if you've got enough imagination, you'll have enough ideas that some of them hit both.

Yes. But there must have been some concepts you've hit on over the last four years, things you've fallen in love with but had to kill because they won't sell.
But you have to be ruthless. And everyone who isn't is going to be wiped out. I still want to be in the same business in five



Photography: **Nick Wilson**



years, 20 years, I love it, and I don't believe that it's necessary to sell out in order to do that. It's possible to make great games that are innovative. It's tough. But it's just a challenge."

What games are you playing at the moment?
What am I playing? Well, to be honest... *Halo*. I got a bad initial impression of it, but I picked it up at Christmas again. Also, a bit of *netHack* now and again.

Is your lack of enthusiasm in that response revealing? What state do you think the gaming industry's in?
I think it's in a terrible state. There aren't any games that are interesting to me personally, and judging by the sales it's a problem for the marketplace as well, a problem for the general consumer. I don't have any philosophical objections to licensed product; you can make an amazing game with a licence, but commercial pressures make it difficult. It's virtually impossible for a publisher to give a developer enough time to make a quality piece of work that ties in with a licence, because of the level of capital investment we have to make and because they're probably not gonna see a return on that. So it's a difficult proposition for developers just to get the time they need.

So they have to take on the risk, and that's what we've done, taken on the risk with a load of projects, and that's what people are going to have to do.

What do you think of the commercial decisions Rare has made since you left?
I was always unhappy with the decision to sell the company. It was one of my reasons for leaving, I guess. So, in the end I was sorry when it happened – it didn't matter to me who it was, I was sorry that we didn't get to remain independent. If they had to sell, I'd have preferred it to be Nintendo, because I've got special affection for Nintendo, a lot of respect for them and their philosophy – original games, to try and foster creativity in games, and on the hardware side, too.

Some might say that Nintendo's GameCube software has shown less originality, less creativity than on its previous platforms.
I think that's true. I think as the marketplace matures it becomes more and more difficult for everybody to find something that's actually a big differentiator, a big new thing.

So Nintendo tried the hard drive, then Sony tried the hard drive, and the Xbox, but it's not a big deal, because PCs have had it for decades. Then there's online; Nintendo tried it in '85, now Sony and Microsoft are trying it. Good luck to them, but the PC has had it for decades, and it's not really a big deal. It's not like... well, the N64 controller, where suddenly tens of millions of people had a great analogue controller, and that made a big difference.

What makes Zoonami different from other developers?
A bunch of things. First is our ambition: to make original and



The core Zoonami team, from left: Gareth Rees (senior research engineer), Mo Jen (audio guru and composer, Funkydilla), Dr Richard Tucker (lead designer and engineer, Funkydilla), Martin Hollis (director), Dr Paul Hankin (senior research engineer), Vitus Ndoumbe (senior animator), Graham Galvin (lead artist, Funkydilla)

Thanks to the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

innovative games that are a success. *Funkydilla*'s an example of that. It's a simple game, enormous fun, and it has a huge franchise possibility – you could make 50 games from it. Another part of our ambition is to reinvigorate the industry, and *Funkydilla*'s a part of that. I think it could turn the corner for music games; I think they're stuck in a bit of a rut at the moment, but I think they've got huge potential. They could be an enormous segment of the industry. It's disappointing.

So where do original ideas come from?
I don't really know. Either they come or they don't. I don't know why, so… I've no answer to that.

Part of it must be down to the people you work with.
You've got to have the right environment, you've got to have the best people, you've got to allow the creativity to exist…

What other studios do you respect?
Nintendo I have the utmost respect for – they're always software publisher of the year for me.

We have an excellent relationship with Nintendo, going back for me personally with *GoldenEye*, then *Perfect Dark*, and it still continues to this day. I have personal connections with Mr Iwata, Mr Miyamoto…

How do you think people are going to react when they see that you've been working on a music game?
A lot of people are going to be very surprised. From the get-go a lot of people have expected another firstperson shooter. But what we're about is making fun games, innovative games, games that have great sales potential. *Funkydilla* meets all those requirements, so we're going to make it. It's a wonderful game and it deserves to be made. There are… other projects in the works that are more obvious. Big, ambitious projects that'll satisfy the people who are looking for that kind of thing, but I'm afraid they'll have to be very patient.

Has the music game genre been underexplored?
I think it hasn't realised its full potential.

And *Funkydilla* will go some way towards that?
Yes.

Why do you think the link between music and videogaming carries so much potential?
If you can pull off the synthesis between the interactivity of a game and the pure emotional connection of music, then you can provide a totally new, fresh experience, and that's why this genre has got so much potential. It's a genre apart. There are loads of ways to make a film into a game. Music games allow you to make an album, or an artist, into a game.

"THERE ARE… OTHER PROJECTS IN THE WORKS THAT ARE MORE OBVIOUS. BUT YOU'LL HAVE TO BE PATIENT"

Nintendo creatives haven't really expressed much interest in music games in recent times, have they?
Nintendo have explored the possibility – put a toe in the water – with *Donkey Konga*. But their philosophy doesn't line up well with inward licensing, and the real potential of music games is inward licensing. It's difficult for Nintendo, it's not the best fit. But they're always interested in new ideas.

Was there a single moment when you knew that *Funkydilla* was one of the prototypes you were going to pursue?
It's more continuous than that. We have to kill projects early, it's the best thing, you have to be ruthless. *Funkydilla* made it through all the hurdles. The moment I realised just how big it could be was the moment I first heard licensed music in there.

Unfortunately, I can't talk about what licensed music we've got in there – it's for demonstration purposes only.

You're in super prototype mode now – what happens next?
We're in the process of selecting a publisher, looking for someone who understands about inward licensing. We're continuing development on other projects, but this is the one that's ready to show the world, that's the stage we're at now.

Will you be taking *Funkydilla* to E3?
No. It's a bit of a cattle market, really.

What about bringing new people into gaming?
Yep. It's clearly a game that anyone could play – you couldn't have a simpler interface and the game couldn't be any simpler. It's accessible to absolutely everybody, any age at all.

But people have to have the console in the first place…
Well, that's out of my control.

Yes, but if the only people who have the gaming machines are people who play typical games – driving, shooters, football – then you're still only going to sell to a niche.
This game will work on any platform. You'd struggle to put it on a SNES, but set-top boxes are a possibility. The problem is that people need a market, and the people who have a market are Nintendo, Sony, Microsoft, and that's pretty much it.

So how do you educate those people that *Funkydilla* is an experience they'll enjoy?
Spend significant resources on promotion, and get the correct artists, the right timing. Everybody listens to music. Everybody knows famous faces, famous voices. That's the way to bring in people who wouldn't normally play the game.

Photography: **Nick Wilson**



The Rick Dickinson guide to classic computer design

He's designed all manner of consumer products, but it's his small black microcomputer we're here to talk about. Meet the ex-Sinclair man who helped kickstart UK gaming…

An inconspicuous street in the middle of Cambridge houses Dickinson Associates' temporary workshop – you could miss it, mistake it for a house if it weren't for the taxi driver assuring you you're in the right place. Inside it is an office, CAD computers and technical drawings marking it unmistakably as a house of design. And this is where we meet **Rick Dickinson**, veteran product designer and secret darling to Sinclair fans across the globe.

See, though Sir Clive often receives the credit, Dickinson was Sinclair's industrial designer, and it was he who defined the look and feel of the ZX era. Thrust into the job straight from university, his first task was to oversee production of the ZX80. As the home computing industry boomed, it was Dickinson who visualised the ZX81, the Spectrum and the QL, saw them through internal battles over cost and quality, into production and into computing legend. If Sinclair had employed someone else, your childhood may have looked entirely different.

Dickinson's work in gaming continues today: one of Dickinson Associates' current projects is the Tiger Telematics Gizmondo (previously the Gametrac), a handheld system. Sketches and models for this litter the desks in the small, light room, the walls adorned with certificates, awards and presentation photos from years gone by. And in the corner, there is a glass case with Sinclair systems, memories backed with a poster: 'You can have any colour, as long as it's black'. The questions begin.

How did you start out in this field?

It started with me wanting to be a train driver, when I was four. Got bored with that, then a lorry driver, then I got seriously interested in civil engineering. About then Lego had launched their brick system, in Denmark and Germany, and since part of my family was German I used to play with Lego all the time. I started building bridges. Also around that time was TV21, Gerry Anderson and Thunderbirds and what have you. The great thing about TV21 was that it was a magazine, so you have these visualisations of amazing things, hardware, spaceships, what have you. So I built things out of Lego, but with it being a square brick format you had to be incredibly inventive and imaginative.

That led to architecture, and then at the last minute I got interested in industrial design, which is what I do today. So I did a four-year degree course in industrial design – that was at Newcastle – and they were the first 'sandwich' courses, which chuck you into industry here and there to gain some experience. One of my industrial placements was with Clive Sinclair, so there was the first connection. At that time he was into calculators, just coming to the end of that era, electronic watches… they'd just launched the world's first pocket TV. I worked there for six months as a student with John Pemberton, who did all the calculator stuff.

I went back, graduated, and about six months after I graduated I got a telegram from John Pemberton which said: 'Ring me ASAP'. At that time I had no idea what ASAP meant, so I spent hours puzzling over it. Eventually I discovered what it was, so I called him, and by then Clive had left Sinclair Radionics and started a new company called Science of Cambridge. So I went for an interview and I discovered that John was leaving and Clive wanted a replacement. So I was offered a job, which was quite scary as John was a world-class designer and I'd just left college.

> "Sinclair represented purity of product design, as pure as Bang & Olufsen. Whether the products functioned well was another matter"

I remember John's parting words, though, and they were: "It's just down to common sense, really. The bits that you don't know you just muddle through till you do know." So that's how it all started, and I was there for about six years. The first job I had to do was put John Pemberton's design for the ZX80 into production. I don't know if the gaming side of things started earlier than that because Science of Cambridge made a product called the MK14, which was aimed at the hobbyist market, sold in kit form, so half the fun was assembling it yourself. Then the ZX80 came along and kickstarted gaming. My first product was the ZX81.

What were your ambitions back then?

Sinclair represented extreme purity of product design – it was as pure as Bang & Olufsen. Whether the products functioned well was another matter, but the design has always been extreme elegance, award winning, in museums around the world. So that was kind of exciting, in at the deep end, just a question of hanging in there, really.

I started probably with the best job you could ever hope for. It was a job that people might hope to get eventually, and I was offered it straight away. I think ultimately my ambitions have been to run my own organisation. I want to design things for people, interesting and useful things. So, for example, I'd love to design stuff for Sony. There's a part of Sony that really thinks ahead to possibilities, people's needs, etc, and they're putting a terrific amount of quality in there. So it'd be great to have a go at that. Running your own show allows you to work for lots of people. In-house work you don't get that, it's a nine-to-five job, you get your pay packet and you work for them. If you're freelance, you always get stuff.

How does the production process work?

There are a number of facets to product design, and I don't think many people know



One of Dickinson's most recent design projects has been Gametrac, recently retitled Gizmondo, represented here in his office as a solid resin cast. "We leave them unpainted at this stage so the mind concentrates on the form, the detailing, features and functionality," he explains. "The features are extremely difficult to move or change and determine how the product will work, and a glitzy painted and 'graphiced' model at this early stage distracts and masks potential functionality failings." In terms of the design solution, he says: "Time was short, leaving nothing to casual experimentation – we had to get to a highly finished level of visual presentation for the design concepts very quickly. This is shooting-from-the-hip stuff, and that's always difficult, nerve racking, and quite a gamble"

01 Sinclair ZX81
02 Sinclair Z88
03 Sinclair Pocket Television
04 Sinclair QL

01



02



03



04



what they are. It's similar to being an architect, only instead of a building it's a consumer product, and usually a building is a one-off where a consumer product is mass produced. On the ZX80, John visualised how the product would look. He produced all the drawings for the parts that he had to design, and also when you design a product you've got to keep in mind the electronics, and you've also got to understand the interface. So he produced the production drawings, and then I came in and had to find mould makers, manufacturers of plastic parts, and so on, and just take it through that process.

Did you play any part in integrating the case around the silicon?
No, in that sense I had no input on the ZX80. I designed some of the peripherals later.

What was the first item you worked on?
Memory expansion devices for the ZX80. So the 1-3K RAM pack would have been the first thing. Can you imagine? Three kilobytes of random access memory! They had to follow the form of the ZX80. It used very cheap low-cost manufacturing processes, because Sinclair didn't have the financial muscle to lay down expensive tooling. So all the case parts were vacuum formed, which is much cheaper than tooling, and the final result looks cheap as well. All the peripheral work I did had to follow on from that, but it wasn't long before we started work on the ZX81.

Did you work on the Microdrive?
Yes. The core thing that drives a lot of Sinclair stuff is cost. It has to be below a certain cost, and that will drive everything. So the closed-loop tape, at that time, was just an industry process, off the shelf, and it was cheap. It became a question of how far you could push it. I didn't do any of the mechanics, that was done by Sinclair in-house, but it was left to me to design a cartridge and how the thing works. So when the cartridge was in the Microdrive there wasn't much left sticking out to get hold of. Hence the serrations – there had to be something to grip. There needed to be some way of putting some ID on the Microdrive, but there was no way we could put it on the large flat surface, because there was no space to recess. So the only place to put it was on the end. And of course it was a very delicate thing when you pulled it out, so we had to have some way of protecting that, and that's where the sleeve came in.

Then there was the casing. At the time we were heavily into Spectrum, and that was what it was primarily designed for, so the casing had to have some sort of family resemblance. I was happy with the design. I know there were reliability issues with the device as a storage medium, but there was nothing I could do about that.

Tell us about the ZX81 RAM pack wobble.
It was for a very simple reason. When you design a product, you've got no idea how it's going to be received by the marketplace. You don't know what the shortcomings of the product are going to be, or how you might want to evolve the product to make it better. So often what happens is you think, 'How are people going to expand this? We don't even know what it's going to be yet.' We decided to have a serial interface, a bus of some sort, quite fundamental to the heart of the product, so if you connected something on to here you could get into the product, electronically and software speaking.

This is where the Sinclair cost thing comes in. If you stick a thumping great connector on that, every ZX81 that goes out has a connector on it, and they're expensive. And if only one per cent of the market uses this $2 connector, and you're making hundreds of thousands of these a month, that's a lot of money you're throwing away. Money you could keep for yourself. So, rather than that, you use an edge connector, where you put aside a part of the circuit board, and you print tracks out to the edge, fingers. You have a slot in the board, like a key, so you get the polarity connect. And that's free, because it's just part of the circuit board, but it's not a very good physical connection.

The tracking on a board is copper, with a tin/lead reflow over the top which allows you to solder. That oxidises quite quickly, which increases the resistance, and makes it harder to get a connection. All edge connectors have a gold flash on the metal parts, and what we should have done is put a gold flash on ours, so we'd have gold-to-gold, and gold doesn't oxidise – so, even if the RAM pack wobbles a bit, you probably wouldn't have lost the connection. Since there was no gold on the board at the time, going for a gold flash would have increased production costs.

When you're in business and design teams, every decision you make is a risk. Most of them work out. This one didn't. On the other hand, I did have a recess underneath, with a place for two screws, so once you put it on you could screw into it. The ZX81 never did that because the RAM pack for the ZX81 was first designed for the ZX80, and it used the mouldings from the ZX80 to save money.

How about the unconventional cooling methods some people used – milk cartons from the fridge, for example?
Yeah... well, whenever you get involved with a product, one of the many questions from the product designer is how hot does this get? Sometimes it gets so hot that you have to fit a cooling system, and that's easy. Some things don't get hot at all, and that's easy, you forget about it. It's the middle ground – "It might get hot, we're not sure." So the calculations at the moment say it's going to produce 1.4W of heat. I'm thinking, 'How much area is that? OK, we'll probably get away with it.' Of course, what inevitably happens is that by the time you go to production the design has evolved electronically, and it's producing five times as much heat. And you've got no way of dealing with it. You'll have hot spots, the CPU or the voltage regulator, so you put a heatsink there but all you're doing is shifting the problem somewhere else. All the heat's going out and going straight into the case. Now I have to get it out of the case, but there are no holes in it... So it's all down to the compromise with the designer, and how lucky you are.

"The 1-3K RAM packs would have been the first things I worked on. Can you imagine? Three kilobytes of random access memory!"





Are there any particular battles you can remember from the early Sinclair days?
This isn't a criticism, but… people say Clive was a bad marketeer, not good at running companies. I thought he was fantastic at both of those. One of the areas that was key with Sinclair was to get the product cost low. Doing that meant more and more people would be interested, and that meant bigger sales. Now, it's very difficult to get product costs low – for example if you buy something in a shop that costs £100, that will be leaving the factory at about £20. The other £80 goes to distributors, VAT, retail margins, the lot. So £20 isn't a lot to actually make a profit, and since you've got to spend a few hundred thousand on tooling…

Sinclair would cut corners to get product costs down. And it becomes a question of whether you're cutting the corner too tightly. I remember on the QL, we were sampling the moulds, some of which were being made in Italy. And I remember being at the Italian mould makers, and they were making a mould for parts that would hold the keys into the front moulding. They required quite a close tolerance. Now, the first time a mould is sampled, it's designed so you can adjust the parts. We pressed all the keys in, turned it upside down, and four or five fell out. We rattled it, and four or five more fell out.

I thought, 'That's OK, we'll just fine-tune this.' And the production controller who was with me at the time said, "We haven't got time." I said, "That's irrelevant! We have to have time, you can't go to market with something that, when you turn it upside down, half the keys fall off." I was absolutely infuriated with the decision. He explained that if we were to modify the keys it'd take another week to fine-tune, and that he wouldn't meet his delivery schedules. I wasn't sufficiently senior at the time to voice what I thought was a logical opinion. I remember reading the reviews and each of them had a bit: 'It's a shame the keys fall off.'

"We pressed all of the QL's keys in, turned it upside down, and four or five fell out. We rattled it, and four or five more fell out"

And wasn't the QL's casing 'flexibile'?
Well, it probably was. But then you can do that with most things, can't you? If you jack your car up on one wheel, there should only be one other wheel left on the ground if it didn't flex, but that's not what happens. But yeah, that's an interesting one. I guess I'd *expect* it to flex if you applied enough force – it's quite a long thing.

I'd imagine if you picked up an Acorn Atom and were able to get hold of the corners, that'd flex too. But you can't, because you can't get your… Well, I suppose the answer to your question is yes, it was!

How similar were the Sinclair products to your initial conceptual sketches?
Amazingly similar. In fact we'd worked with real models – it was the only way of really telling. If you produce a drawing, you have to interpret it, but with a model there's no interpretation. So it hardly varied at all, and that was part of the problem. You produce a model, show it to the client, then you have to make a million guesses about whether things'll fit, and go through the production engineering. The client sees the original model and thinks, 'Great, I like that,' but then you go through production engineering and the software guy says, "Right, we need three more keys," or the engineers say, "We're gonna need a bigger battery." By that stage the client is saying, "I don't care," and pointing at your original model and declaring that that's how he wants it. I don't think the Sinclair stuff changed at all, because Clive was fanatical about the design. He liked it, it was exactly how it wanted to be."

But he wanted it cheap.
Yeah. Fewest number of parts, cheapest manufacturing processes, yeah, for sure.

Those processes must have changed over the years.
Not hugely, surprisingly.

What about the influence of CAD?
CAD is just a tool to allow you to create specifications. How that part is made remains the same. So, for example, there's no difference in the manufacturing processes of the ZX81 or the Gametrac.

Which must make things easier.
It does. What happens is that you push the processes harder. Even in the Sinclair days, you couldn't do what we did. And you could say, well, how did you do it, then? We just pushed people harder. Computers are a great benefit in that respect – we try to do more with the plastic parts, and we can get the computers to do simulations of the moulding. It can tell us problems, things we have to change, but no, the plastic is pretty much the same – they come out with plastics that are slightly better, flow better, how the plastic goes in, that's all the same. Same principles, just more refined.

Would the Sinclair products have been different if you'd had computer design?
Probably. Because the way we worked in those days, if I couldn't draw something, then we couldn't make it. If the toolmaker couldn't make it, then that was it, the end of the line. I'd love to do a ZX81 today. How would it look? Well, I've got much more design freedom, both internally and how we

"Xbox? I quite like it" Rick Dickinson on non-Sinclair hardware

01: Commodore 64
"Like everything else at the time: big, bulky, never really thought to think beyond what the industry was currently producing. No innovation, bog-standard approach. Can I swear? Just grim. You haven't got a product designer working on that. Just run of the mill."

02: TI99/4a
"They try harder. TI is good. They have their own corporate design, their own product designers in house, and you can see they're trying, looking. They used to use a lot of pressed metal, so you end up with a completely different-looking product. They tended to follow this Japanesey kind of feel. Better, more interesting."

03: BBC Micro
"Well, I know the designer of the BBC Micro, and he's a fantastic product designer, and... I don't know what happened there. I've got a great respect for Alan Boothroyd, and I know Chris Curry as well, who started Acorn, and I remember asking him about the design of it, and he said: 'The first model didn't look like this.' So all I can imagine is that Alan didn't have any control from the first design to how it ended up."

04: Dragon 32
"Gosh. Yeah. Welsh. That looked like a product design consultancy did it, and it was interesting, yeah. Getting better."

05: Sord M5
"There was a glut of computers like this, I recall. They did use design houses, but you could look at it this way: if you're going to have a keyboard, and the keyboard is always the same, then the computers are all gonna look the same."

06: TRS-80
"If I recall, the TRS-80 made me think of tape machines at the time. Dictaphones. But that also reminded me of the route that TI were going down."

07: Oric-1
"Wasn't that brown? A flat slab? I remember vaguely it getting better."

08: Commodore Amiga
"I'll tell you what I remember. Atari did an interesting-looking one, and Apple came out with an interesting one at the time – the first one they did, I think – and Atari seemed to copy that."

09: Sony PlayStation
"I remember going through a phase where I was quite bored with gaming solutions. I think it's probably because they're mostly Japanese-supplied solutions."

10: PlayStation2
"Bloody crap, really. You can see someone's having a go somewhere, but it needs much more development, much more tender loving care, more time, give the designer a chance, and let him see it through. But they all end up as cheap-looking solutions, a bit like Sinclair. The Sinclair thing was that a minimum amount of money had to be spent on moulding and decorating it. The mouldings fall out of the mould tool, and it's not enough. Compare that with the mobile phone industry, where the amount of cost that goes into how it looks, the finishing... it's so sophisticated."

11: Xbox
"In terms of industrial design aesthetic, the Xbox is interesting. Yeah, there are things about it I quite like. You're probably thinking, 'This guy's a weirdo,' but yeah, there are things about it I like."

12: GameCube
"Mmm. They're getting better."

13: GameBoy Advance
"They tried to give it an interesting shape. I don't think they succeeded. I think the engineering lets it down, so your perception as a user, certainly as a designer, is that it's cheap. The seriousness doesn't come through."

14: GameBoy Advance SP
"That's a huge departure. This reeks of sophistication with that mobile phone feel. [The clamshell] is a massive functional advantage. You could argue most products should be like that, like flip phones, but if it was so good there'd be nothing but flip phones. Having said that, it changes the dynamic totally. How are you going to hold it? By having a clamshell you impose restrictions, but you can get around them."

15: N-Gage
"When I first saw it I was very interested, because it's very different. Nokia are in a wonderful position where they can experiment, and they don't necessarily have to have every product as a sure-fire success. Sony put products out just to experiment – they might not sell any, they might not make a profit, but the learning experience goes into the next product. I don't know if I'd have done any better with the N-Gage, because you've got to understand it's a mobile phone but it's not a mobile phone. They're trying to do something different, and I can't criticise the result they've come up with. The question is whether what they're trying to do is the right thing to do. If you ask me a stupid question, you're gonna get a stupid design back."

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This ZX Spectrum alphanumeric keypad was originally designed by Dickinson for the Spanish market, although it did appear in other territories

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01 This white Spectrum+ is one of the rarest Dickinson designs you'll see. Only a few were made, for colour-test purposes, and they were snapped up by friends and family of Sinclair employees in the '80s

02 This translucent ZX80 was made just for fun by the company that supplied the vacuum-formed casings of the machine. A wood-effect model was also made ("It looked ferocious," says Dickinson)

03 A prototype of Pandora – a portable computer format invented by Sinclair just before he sold out to Amstrad. The machine never made it to market

04 Another prototype – this time a flat-screen TV. "I could write a book on the development of any Sinclair product as they were all so unique," says Dickinson

05 Sinclair game controller prototypes. "The disc was cupped in both hands and they could be rocked to give direction of movement," Dickinson explains

06 Yet another super-rare Dickinson prototype – the Harbour Master. This laptop, utilising what was then recent LCD display technology, was designed to work as the hub of a sophisticated alarm system for boats, homes or hotels

produce the shapes. In those days, things were fairly flat – if you had curves they had to be constructible curves. Today we can have what we call freeform, so things can be completely non-constructible. As long as it can be put in the computer, we can make it.

Out of all your products, what's your favourite piece of hardware?

Well, probably something that never came to market. Towards the end of the Sinclair days – about a year before the company was sold to Amstrad – Clive set up a new organisation called MetaLab. And I moved there. It was an R&D hotbed – originally it was going to be called Blue Sky. Clive always wanted to come up with new things, he had pet ideas. One computer we did was called Pandora, and it was probably the forerunner to the first laptops. So you need your own display. He wanted to use the flatscreen tube from out of his pocket TV, instead of doing it properly, and getting an LCD from Toshiba, or whatever. We got this crap tube which just wasn't going to do the job, because the raw image is very small and compressed. That saves battery power, and you decompress it with a lens. So, you have this lens which makes the picture right, but makes you seasick. There's no way you're going to be able to type on this thing. It was a non-starter.

And he wanted the bloody Microdrives in there, which weren't reliable enough. You needed something else, but nooo, he wanted them. One of the problems with the Microdrives on the QL was that by the time you screwed them down separately, the torque reaction on the screws shifted them around slightly and you got contact problems. What they should have done is not used a separate Microdrive chassis, but tooled up a pair of chassis. But no, that's extra cost. You get quite frustrated as a designer. You can see the problems, and why they occur, how you could have avoided it.

What a lot of people wanted to do was come out and ride on the coat tails of what we were doing. We didn't go out there to design games machines. When the ZX80 came out games barely existed, we just wanted to address hobbyists. It was a complete fluke that games came out of it, but Clive wasn't interested in games, and for years he insisted it was a serious product. Eventually he gave in and accepted that it had become a games product. As the company grew, we took on marketing people and they wanted to promote the marketing side. I started work, without Clive knowing, on a possible games machine called Loki. And it was fantastic. We were thinking about the whole Sinclair philosophy, but learning from it. So one of the Sinclair philosophies was low entry cost to the market – we thought about that, and then we thought about where people would want to expand from there. We thought about connectivity – it was this fantastic arrangement of boxes you could plug together. Even if you didn't play games you'd want it. You'd see it in the shops and go, "What is that? I want it."

So it was a fantastic-looking piece of hardware, even today – I'd love to take it to Sony and tell them I think their approach should be like this. That was probably the most exciting to work on in some senses, but nothing came of it.

"One of the unique things with Sinclair was that everything you did there had never, ever been done before. You were creating a market"

What was the most exciting thing about working during that time at Sinclair?

One of the unique things with Sinclair was that everything you did there had never, ever been done before. You were creating a market. Clive invented the electronic wrist calculator. Before Sinclair, they simply didn't exist, you couldn't buy one anywhere. The pocket calculator didn't exist before Sinclair came along – you could argue that home computers didn't exist, really. So what is a ZX81 going to look like?

There's a lot of psychology in how a product looks. Shape has a language. I'll give you an example. If you're walking up to a door, you're taking information in. Which side is it hinged? If you press it on the wrong side, it's not going to open. Does it open away from you or towards you? So by the time you're at the door, you know what to do. How do you know? Well, because there's a handle there. Is it a push or a pull? If it's a plate, you're going to push, a handle you're going to pull.

So you approach the door, pull the handle, and it doesn't work. Because someone's got the design wrong – it actually pushes, so why's there a handle on there? That's the design language.

So, if you look at a keyboard with a green key, you know that the green key is going to make it, as it says, run. The red key is going to make it stop. You create a subliminal hierarchy, and these different groupings have different functionalities. There's so much design thinking that goes into that, even before you get involved with the software guys. How is a ZX81 going to look? Like a toaster? Is it going to look like a Dictaphone? What sort of feel? What sort of shape?

So it was a stimulating time.

Absolutely! You don't know what you're doing. You end up with an answer, which I suppose means you *do* know what you're doing, but you blunder along…

What do you think your legacy will be?

Well, I've never thought of what I do as particularly important. And legacy is associated with importance.



From condoms to keys

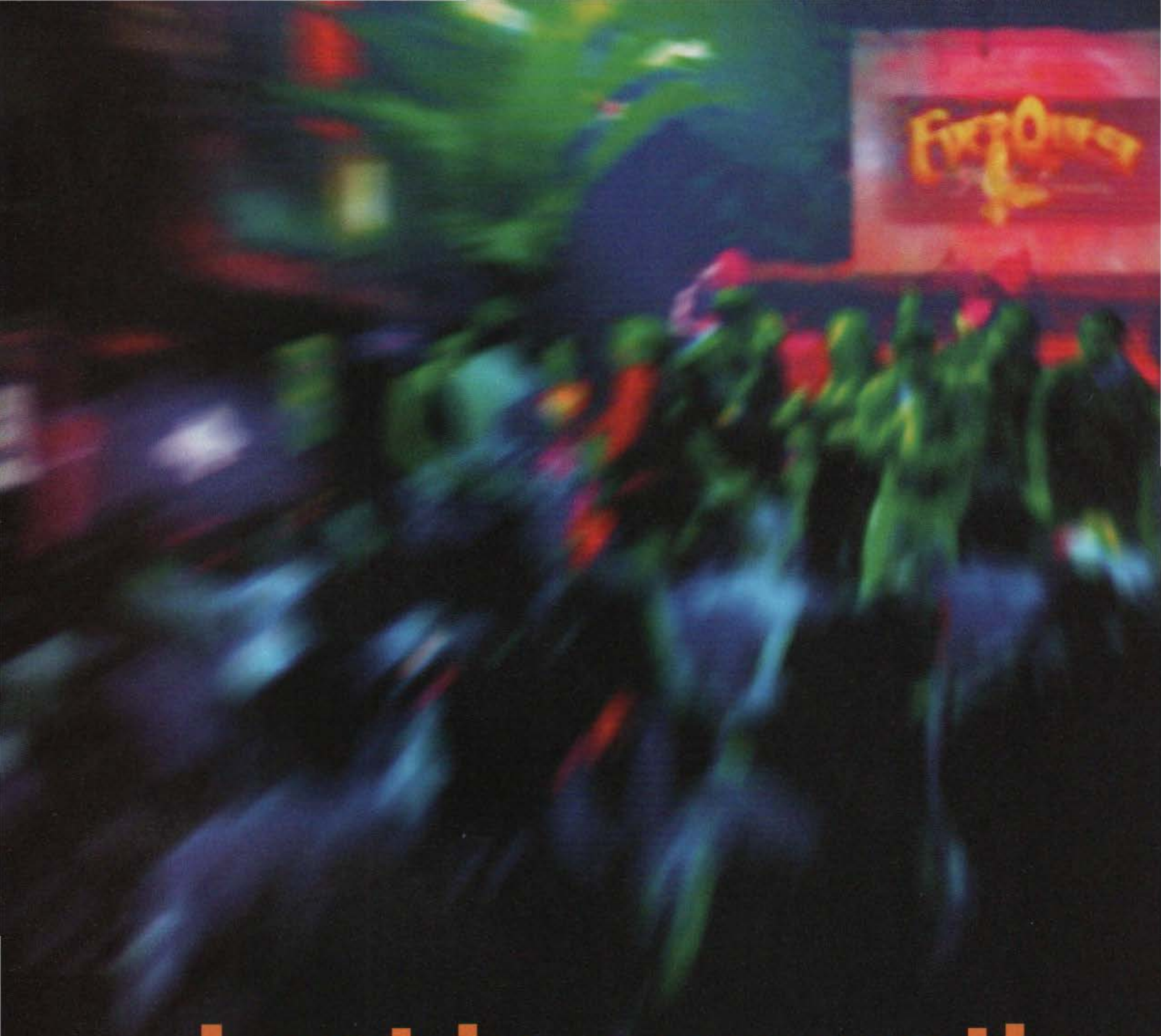
Rick Dickinson explains how the Spectrum's rubber keyboard was born

"In a single step our [Spectrum] keyboard concept [took computer keyboards] from 200 components to one. That is amazing by any standards.

"I'm not sure who can claim the fundamental idea, it could well be David Southward, with inputs from Clive and Jim Westwood, but I know David produced a design drawing and made a single key prototype. This was developed in-house, and I looked at ways of integrating the design and production restrictions. The one-piece mat was attractive in manufacturing and theoretically on cost, but we had a long way to go from here to production. No one made anything like this, and there was nobody to ask!

"Due to the desire to have a moving key effect, we relied on the displacement or bending of thin walls connecting a key to the mat. It was decided to allow the key to hinge down from the top edge, rather than all edges collapsing down together – this was a more controlled and predictable action, and therefore felt better too. The mechanical effect of this characteristic fatigued the materials we were trying, though, and eventually it was realised that silicone rubber did not suffer from this kind of action. At that time silicone could not be bonded to, which meant we could not print on to the key surfaces, and the main silicone production output in the UK seemed to be in condoms. So we went to The London Rubber company, and amongst the condom and hot water bottle machines the design was evolved further with prototype aluminium tooling, and a method of printing and adhering to silicone devised. The key mat required a cover to obscure the features between the keys – this became an aluminium printed pressing. The aluminium pressing industry was well advanced in precision shaping and hole forming, and just as importantly in printing technology. I had between five and six pieces of separate information to get on and around each key – it represented a graphic and manufacturing challenge indeed. With that amount of information it would be difficult to be economic with cost, and also to be sure the right piece of information was associated with the right key and key function. The addition of multiple colours helped greatly, and we found a company in Birmingham that manufactured cooker dials in huge volumes. They had all the know-how we needed – I just applied it differently.

"Today I can try a Spectrum or especially a Z88 keyboard and think that it was damn good. OK, the keys could get stuck under the metal plate, and it certainly felt different. With more time and resourcing we could have evolved the shortcomings out of the product, but we never had time, it was on to the next thing, and so on. Maybe it's the things we find slightly not quite technically right about a product that are precisely the things we fondly remember them by..."



Lost in convention

What happens when thousands of EverQuest fans meet in Las Vegas? We find out…

"You're going to a what?" asks the immigration officer once he's scrutinised our passports. "An *EverQuest* convention. It's, erm, an online roleplaying game…"

"I know what *EverQuest* is," he quickly interrupts, nearly lapsing into an eye-roll or similar discernibly human expression, "I've just never heard of a convention."

He's not alone, even though Sony Online Entertainment has been regularly running FanFaires across the US for much of the game's lifespan. This particular Faire is a special occasion, celebrating five years of *EQ*'s contentious but undeniable success, and also featuring the first public showing of *EverQuest 2*. For both reasons it's drawn its largest crowd yet to the aptly fantastic landscape of Las Vegas. Our driver from the airport is unimpressed with the estimation of 2,000-plus fans in attendance, however, noting that the bakery or shoe conventions pull in tens of thousands. Taking this as a slight against gaming, we spend the rest of the journey in silence, confident this will still be the largest number of *EQ* players we'll ever see in captivity.

Friday morning has the intimate and slightly eerie familiarity of life imitating virtual art: the queues snaking around areas of interest, the tightly bunched crowds, the kilts and capes and broadswords. War cries and hearty Olde English echo around the pavilion, although incessant



shouted auctions of rare items are, thus far, absent. An attendee in ceramic plate mail makes his entrance just as a group by the door laugh at some unrelated shared joke – cavalierly, he doesn't even flinch. There's a tangible confidence in the air, a sense that these people broke the ice in Norrath years ago, so social awkwardness went out with marble-flecked 20-sided dice.

Events start with the Live Quest, which sends groups of players on a real-life *EQ* fetch quest



The dwarven warrior on the left went on to win the costume contest, noting in her acceptance speech that only in *EverQuest* could a five-foot bearded woman win a beauty contest. A well-deserved victory, though we made off with the birthday cake







around the convention halls: "Don't go into the casino area, not even if you're on fire," exhorts an organiser, obviously alarmed by the schedule's wording of 'running amok'. The war drums start, as does the running, surely contradicting maternal warnings about doing so with bladed weapons. For a happy moment we're surrounded by bright-eyed players who have mistaken our press passes for NPC badges. They quickly wise up to the real thing: the costumed volunteers whose stock replies remain impressively unforced for the next two hours. One group barters for an NPC's item by performing a song-and-dance routine, surely a decisive victory for emergent gameplay.

Left largely to their own devices, the crowds manage themselves in the same happy anarchy that is characteristic of *EQ* at its best. Among the buccaneers, dark elves and green-tressed girls there is both a near-equal gender split and an age variation that's the stuff of marketing fantasy. They've come in couples, or entire adventuring families, and attendees who are ostensibly old enough to know better wear some of the best costumes.

Perhaps everything we thought we knew about *EQ* is wrong, we muse, and then some wit shouts: "The NPC's respawned, kill him again!" and creases up at his own joke. Well, almost everything, then.

The Live Quest winds down for the day to the expected accompaniment of people repeatedly shouting that they have rare items for trade. Sizeable guilds of necessity have formed around the ashbins, suggesting that SOE could be on to a winning formula if it introduces smoking into the game. In the stalls of the bazaar, freebie Babes Of Norrath calendars (previously a pre-order bonus with *Champions Of Norrath*) are shifting well; we graciously decline one proffered by an SOE staffer. "I think it's pretty funny," she shrugs when asked what the female staff make of it, adding that a male model version – Hunks Of Norrath, perhaps – made the rounds within SOE to redress the cheesecake balance. *Champions* itself has a surprisingly subdued presence, with only three PS2s and no multitaps, compared to a classroom-sized block of PCs running *EQ*. Both areas will see constant use for the duration of the Fanfaire, the PC block often looking like an artist's impression of a LAN party in Valhalla.

We check in on the afternoon's panel discussions: topics include forums on *EQ* minutiae (which prove scarily comprehensive), fantasy author RA Salvatore signing books and advising fan fiction writers on how to make their prose slightly less purple, and a presentation of *EQ*'s imminent graphics engine makeover. The audiences are deeply obsessive, but the subjects of that obsession vary widely, from the ideal chat-bar colour scheme to the maximum possible arrow damage ("I've seen a 32K crit," one whispers reverentially). For the most part the panels are constructive and in good humour, and the *EQ* staff field questions, complaints and accusations with the sort of diplomacy that suggests they could moonlight for the UN.

"Are you guys developers?" Waiting for the lifts, we're jumped by an attendee determined to voice his disapproval over an 'unbeatable' zone in the latest expansion. Claiming that we're not proves ineffectual, so we smile, we nod, we shuffle out of the exit into the fizzy Las Vegas night and the fifth anniversary party at the Beach nightclub. Doubtless abetted by a liberal SOE bar tab, the crowd there is rocking out with less inhibition and more co-ordination than might be expected of long-term *EQ* subscribers. From the relative safety of the uppermost balcony, press and staff twirl their VIP wristbands in the ultraviolet light and survey the roof-raising.

"You're a bunch of dorks, but I love you for it," declares the live band's frontman after dutifully reading yet another of the night's many guild and server shout-outs. The undulating dancefloor whoops and gives rock salutes.

Perhaps everything we thought we knew about *EQ* is wrong, we muse, and then some wit shouts: "The NPC's respawned, kill him again!" and creases up

The sequel cometh

EverQuest 2's showing looms over Saturday's schedule, unfortunately running through the second Live Quest. It's a conflict of interests that may explain why the initial crowd is less diverse than previous events. The set-up raises press eyebrows and audience hackles – the block of PCs used for *EQ* has now been cordoned off, and







it seems we are providing the hands for the hands-on, surrounded by jilted attendees.

"All we can do is watch them play," scowls someone directly behind our seat; we feign studious interest in a map of the Isle of Refuge, until sardonic applause raises our eyes to the now-blank projector screen. The development team's computer has just lost power, quickly followed by all the other systems. To the staff's credit they manage to keep attention away from the fact that the power supply is actually on fire, and also restore it remarkably quickly. Then it's only a matter of realising the big-screen demo PC is the one system of the batch below minimum spec (the growing crowd's faces darken when the game grinds to a stutter), another emergency reboot, and *EQ2* can finally flex its muscles. It gets a warm reception, perhaps eased by the developers shamelessly playing up for the audience with a l33t-speak running commentary. The American journos demand to be transported into the big-screen action; the European contingent and two Asian reporters politely totter around taking screenshots of isolate spectacle. Five hours, and the sensation of being watched by hundreds of people, slip away with what in retrospect will be alarmingly life-stealing ease.

Original and best?

Returning to the convention area later we find *EQ* and its players have reclaimed the PCs, presenting a row of T-shirt prints ranging from gangsta rap to Ghost In The Shell. Some play side by side, some frantically text distant servermates; others are powerlevelling with near-catatonic detachment. The original *EQ* is hardly the spectator sport its sequel proves to be, but the staggering weight of numbers in the game world speaks for itself, and mirrors the Faire with surreal accuracy. Walking through the cavernous right-angled halls of the Hilton, groups of attendees camped out in every corner, is an experience only a few particle effects away from some beige-carpeted expansion.

The concluding grand banquet brings the whole 2,500-strong crowd together with scant concern for the fabric of reality. Looking out across the tables is an inspiring sight: if evidence were ever needed that a game can live far beyond the confines of its box, it's here in widescreen splendour. A video of *EQ*'s developers thanking the players for five years' support is played, and while it could be cynically observed that it's the least they could do, those present seem honestly enthused, humbled and grateful to the fanbase.

A birthday cake, several orders of magnitude too small to go around, is brought in for the cameras along with the lure of a photo op with the Firiona Vie model. She smiles dazzlingly and gazes into the middle distance, just like on all the boxcovers. For a tense minute there are no takers, but once one finds the confidence, scores more follow. They're still posing as the costume contest starts; and with impressive sleight of hand the cake is smuggled out. The contest itself is dominated early on by some inspired in-joke performances, leaving many of the other hopefuls who came without choreography to mumble that their armour was hand-made and shuffle offstage again. It's the first time – bar some of the wounded monologues made during the rules discussion panel – that the Faire has slowed to a slightly uncomfortable crawl.

Deafeningly good cheer quickly returns, though, along with the compere's descent into insobriety, and it ends like all the best fifth birthday parties – on a sugar high with the guests running around until they fall over. Sunday morning's aftermath is subdued, although the PC block is full until the last possible moment. Some of the players are familiar from the previous two days, but none fit a stereotype apart from that of playing too much *EQ*. As the stalls are packed up and the banners come down, we wonder if this is a portent for the game: a handful of players still going through the motions as the world moves on. But the FanFaire, and the fans, will be back – there's another later this year, and a return to Las Vegas mooted for 2005 (interesting times for *EQ* post-*World Of Warcraft* and *EQ2*). A girl of 12 or so watches fireworks cascade across Norrath's sky while she touch-types with ease and chats animatedly with players either side. It looks suspiciously like the acceptance we've always forecast for gaming, and for that it seems hardly fair to burst the balloons just yet.

Looking out across the tables, if evidence were ever needed that a game can live far beyond the confines of its box, it's here in widescreen splendour



If the crowds beginning to gather here at the *EQ2* press event look a little reserved, it's probably because they're still recovering from the night before (below right), or an early morning (below). We understand the little guy rolls a mean critical

Teaching an old MMOG new tricks

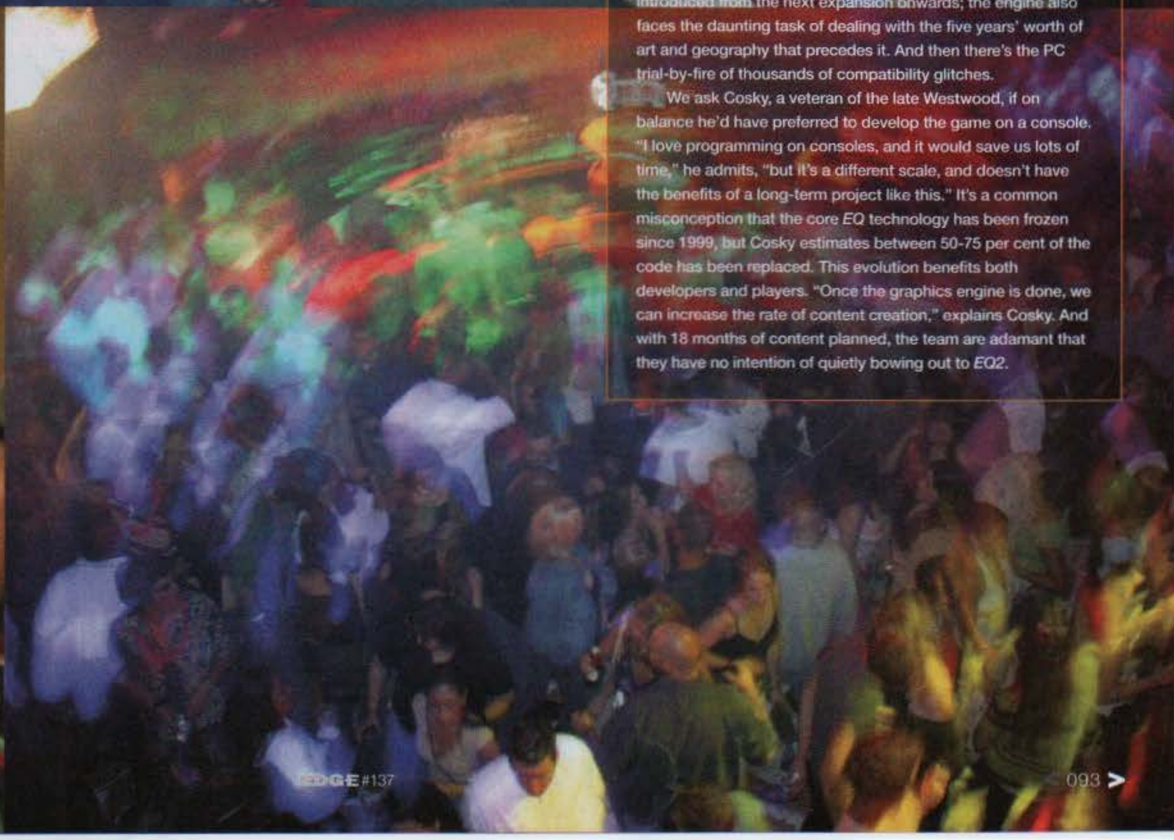
In a well-timed gesture of support for the original *EverQuest* among the building swell of *EQ2* hype, SOE demonstrated its replacement graphics engine. Sensibly, it takes advantage of pixel-shader techniques rather than upping system requirements, the developer well aware that *EQ*'s ability to run on a steam-powered PC has helped its ubiquity.

Bump-mapping, glow effects and specular lighting are demonstrated, and an impressive new transitioning sky has already been implemented on test servers (garnering its creator, assistant lead programmer **Eric Cosky**, a spontaneous ovation at the public discussion). The rewrite also addresses collision detection and pathfinding issues – admitting responsibility for a temporary swell of 'falling through the world' bugs as a side effect of these changes earns the self-deprecating Cosky a second round of applause.

Models and textures using pixel-shader effects will be introduced from the next expansion onwards; the engine also faces the daunting task of dealing with the five years' worth of art and geography that precedes it. And then there's the PC trial-by-fire of thousands of compatibility glitches.

We ask Cosky, a veteran of the late Westwood, if on balance he'd have preferred to develop the game on a console. "I love programming on consoles, and it would save us lots of time," he admits, "but it's a different scale, and doesn't have the benefits of a long-term project like this." It's a common misconception that the core *EQ* technology has been frozen since 1999, but Cosky estimates between 50-75 per cent of the code has been replaced. This evolution benefits both developers and players. "Once the graphics engine is done, we can increase the rate of content creation," explains Cosky. And with 18 months of content planned, the team are adamant that they have no intention of quietly bowing out to *EQ2*.









EverQuest 2

It begins on a ship's sea-bleached deck, the sun flickering cold and golden from behind a billowing sail, the shattered moon's streaked debris like an open wound in the sky. Glassy waves swell and break out to the horizon, where a reassuringly whole moon catches pale reflections in the deep. Approach your fellow passengers and they turn to make eye contact (and look down, in our case, as our character has accidentally turned out shorter than intended), speak aloud, gesture expressively.

Oh, and this is a massively multiplayer online roleplaying game.

It's easy to forget, and we will several times during the *EverQuest 2* hands-on. True, there are only a handful of players in the sprawling environments, but there's an undeniable vitality here, an absence of the one-step-removed sensation that has plagued the MMO genre.

"It's really about making you feel," agrees lead designer **Chris Cao**. "Players play games to feel happiness, or fear, or whatever. So our cinematic style, the voiceovers – it's all about bringing the world to life."

Liveliness isn't necessarily what we'd expected from the setting of post-cataclysmic Norrath. *EQ2* presents a world coming to terms with the physical and spiritual fallout of a series o devastating events, from the moon of Luclin's destruction to the vast pantheon of gods falling silent. "It might be upsetting to players of the original, but our job is to turn that into a fictionalised sense of loss," Cao explains, "so that it's not about losing your 65th-level characte but about the world being blown apart, and realising you can help explore and rediscover it. That's engaging content."

Ideally it will prove engaging for newcomers, too, with the atmosphere of displacement encouraging self-discovery: character generation consists of defining your appearance, and then th game starts. RPG conventions emerge through play – start as a simple fighter and later you'll see first-hand what signing up for crusader duties entails, and later again for the paladin. "It means new players are learning the jargon we take for granted," says Cao. "And that gets around the 'newbie' volatility, which puts a lot of people off."

It's also put the focus back on the character







The game's default letterboxed presentation serves to make the (currently placeholder) interface completely transparent – a stark contrast to the original game's prioritising, which many play with overlays dominating the screen. Vistas like *EQ2*-era Qeynos (below) practically demand a cinematic viewing



rather than the character sheet. There's a real sense of being invited to roleplay people, not a collection of complimentary modifiers, although there is no shortage of stats behind the scenes.

Cao describes it as an effort to bring *EQ2* back to the pen-and-paper roots of roleplaying, where players have personal value as part of an intimate group, as opposed to *EverQuest*'s enormous, anonymous raiding parties. The press hands-on isn't the ideal environment to see this at work; with a game to plunder and copy to write, groups form and collapse on random whims. It's visually tangible, though, in the nuances of character detail and incidental animation: these are interesting characters that appear aware of the world around them. They're a crowd you want to hang out with. Equally, the environments – the fraction of them we have time to see – are evocative in a way that postcard-perfect screens can't express. The thrill of exploration from swimming out to a half-sunken pagoda in a sheltered sea basin, or discovering starry-painted chambers in the catacombs under Qeynos's streets, is intoxicating. Miserly, we wonder if the effect will be the same when there are hundreds, not dozens, plumbing their depths, but Cao is unfazed: "We're not trying to keep secrets to keep content, but to reveal them. All our secrets are about opening the game up – once you discover one, we want everyone to know about it, because then there's even more to find."

There's a sense of being invited to roleplay people, not a collection of complimentary modifiers, although there is no shortage of stats behind the scenes

And despite our desire to keep Norrath's beauty to ourselves, there are just as many areas that deserve to be teeming with blundering, item-auctioning, gossiping life. Vitality in an online game is a reciprocal arrangement, no matter how careful the pre-planning.

The FanFaire crowd seem ambivalent about *EQ2* before the showing, although most appear at least impressed, if not converted, on the day. The fact that it was originally conceived to replace their game makes many wary, which Cao is sympathetic towards: "I understand it because I'm an *EQ* player myself. We're just asking them to try it, and then some players will find *EQ2* appealing, and some will decide they prefer *EQ*. The original is still going to be there – it's not like we're pulling the rug out from under anybody."

However, even in a worst-case scenario of being snubbed by fans, *EQ2* is as much about forming an audience of its own, and it's here that the game may achieve its greatest success. "We want to ask the mass market what we can do to bring them into our world," says Cao. Though it's too early to know for certain, they may just have the answers.

Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Scores broadly correspond to the following sentiments: zero: nothing, one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

Edge's most played

R-Type Final

It may be a memory test, and most of the wonderful 99 ships may be pointless, but the scale, the beauty and the thrills are so narcotic you'll hardly care.



(PS2) Irem

Beyond Good & Evil

One of the finest adventures of last year, Jade's battle to save her world with just a camera, a stick and some sentient animals is captivating and rewarding.



(GC, PC, PS2, Xbox) Ubisoft

Phantasy Star Online

Even though the once-buzzing servers have become a distant memory, the theraputic beauty of Ragol's rhythmic carnage can still entrance for hours on end.



(Dreamcast) Sega

Far Cry

Playing it through again but with different difficulty settings allows the excellent AI to be studied in more detail. And headshots become even more rewarding.



(PC) Ubisoft

Galleon, ch5, vs2

Why Rhama wants you for a sunbeam

Here's the problem with god games. You're always weak. You're always so helpless and ineffectual that you have to rely on ant-people to do your bidding. Your vocabulary isn't full of smite, rail and vengeance, it's full of clicks, menus and queues. Sure, now and again you may be able to boil the seas and erase empires, but only if you've earned enough Armageddon points by babysitting your ant-people. That's not being a god. Gods don't have to earn anything. Omnipotent deities do not have to wait for bars to refill. Gods, if they choose, can kick ass.

However, that's the one thing god games don't let you do. God games hinge on indirect control. Enforcing this is essential – it's what gives the game its meaning and balance – but it makes a mockery of what the genre name promises. To really feel like a god, you need to have the option of rolling up your sleeves, of getting down and dirty – making things how you want them to be. And that isn't the preserve of the god game; it's the preserve of the thirdperson action adventure game.

Galleon's Captain Rhama isn't a god, he's a man. He's all man, in fact, which is good news for the ladies who sail with him. But within the game world, he's more powerful than anyone or anything. He is the dynamic force which changes the world to meet his desires – whether it's by switching a door from open to shut or preserving the existence of an entire ecology. He may be in human form, but he is everything that god games promise but can't deliver: potent, direct, immediate, all-conquering.

Perhaps it isn't a fair contest. Most people have another understanding of gods, as a remote force, an unseen hand which nudges people one way or the other. When gods make it physical and personal, when they incarnate themselves into the game world and start messing about with the things in it, then we have quite another word for it. So maybe it's time we started talking about Jesus games as well as god games. If nothing else, it would go some way towards explaining the nifty resurrection that happens every time you reload a save.













Galleon

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **SCi** Developer: **Confounding Factor** Price: **£40** Release: **June 11**



Galleon is that rare thing – a three-dimensional game where the third dimension extends more than ten feet about your head. Climbing is audaciously unrealistic, allowing Rhama to spider up cliffs







Swimming works better than you fear it might, although the combination of enclosed spaces, a flip-happy camera and unforgiving timers will kill you over and over until you perfect your routine

There's something self-fulfiling about it. It seemed inevitable that *Galleon's* brilliance would be confounded by an assortment of failures, and it turns out to be true. Each takes their toll, denting the achievements of something which otherwise fulfils so much of its dazzling promise.

That dazzle is as bright as it was five years ago. From its 'Boy's Own' beginnings, the yarn of the dashing Captain Rhama and the Mysterious Ship evolves into a focused, irresistible story. Simply told, it gains its weight – as every game narrative should – from the places Rhama goes and the things he does while he's there. The places are sumptuous and unpredictable, less a series of levels than a grand tour of palaces and prisons, island mountains and ocean caverns. And despite this being a true platform game, what he does when he gets there is organic and improvised, the direct antithesis of the mechanical requirements which still characterise the bulk of the genre.

This freeform movement is the first of *Galleon's* subtle revolutions. Rhama has no movement controls beyond run and jump. Swinging, crawling and vaulting are all imposed by the geography of the world he's moving through. When moving cautiously, it's enough to point him towards his ultimate destination and watch with pride as he sidesteps obstacles and perfectly places his own pixels. And if that wasn't startling enough, there's this: camera control and movement are on the same stick. It's part of the lore of *Galleon* now, but stop and think about it again. A 3D platform game set in vast organic levels, with camera and movement on the same stick. It will infuriate you, without doubt, but only rarely and certainly less often than many similar games with traditional, cumbersome solutions.

The next revolution is the way of interacting with objects. Rather than pressing a button to activate them, a hotspot target system allows you to identify and select iten from a distance. Then, to operate them, you simply approach. By the time he gets there, Rhama will have figured out what he's going to do with it. There's no standing dumbly by waiting for you to pull his strings. These two systems – moving and using – conspire to grace the hero with a remarkably convincing representation of intelligence.

It's an illusion completed by the cut-scenes. The flamboyant simplicity of To Gard's characters communicates expression and mood with far more human precision than the dead-eyed accuracy of something like *Onimusha 3's* models. Eyebrows raise and lips curl, closely keyed to the excellent voice acting and naturalistic scripting. Rhama's companions, the passionate Faith and the resolute Mihoko, are sensuous,

From its 'Boy's Own' beginnings, the yarn of the dashing Captain Rhama and the Mysterious Ship evolves into a focused, irresistible story

Previously in **E**77, **E**97, **E**112, **E**133













The size and freedom of the levels is undoubtedly *Galleon*'s strongest point, and makes up for its graphical weaknesses – most noticeable in the dithered sky and blank seas





Rhama does everything with marvellous gusto, bellowing with rage and slamming against walls when he has reason to. Most euphoric is his almost boundless acceleration. Find enough space and he will run faster and faster and faster until you feel like flying

intelligent and irresistible. More revolutions? How about a flexible save system that notices when you get stuck? Or simply embedding optional hints in the game to ensure you don't get stuck in the first place? Then there are the collectibles that are actually useful in themselves – health mushrooms and one-shot pistols – instead of meaningless tokens that need to be traded in for a completist's gold star.

But what of those confounding factors? It's a list, sadly. Combat is one of the weakest elements of the game. Fights ostensibly take place in the round, but there isn't the precision in the controls to elevate them beyond repetitive brawls. The ingenious system of combat points, which makes comedy martial arts moves available as Rhama lands more punches, is hampered by having a roster of only four attacks to choose from. Even on the later levels, the chances are that you'll only earn the room-buster attack just as you've killed all but the last straggler. The movement and object interaction systems which work with such fluidity on open ground become frustrating and imprecise in closed quarters, and their faults are laid bare during some of *Galleon*'s biggest disappointments: the boss fights and timed challenges.

To find these mainstays of traditional game design in the midst of so much fresh thinking is startling in the first place, but the paucity of their execution is the real shock. Boss fights share a theme – that Rhama must clamber on to the monsters to stab their weak points – which makes most encounters feel like a repetition of the last. Collision detection is dreadful, and the process is almost always reduced to a hit-and-miss test of determination. The timed challenges are often worse, requiring repeated trial and error and turning Rhama from an obliging acrobat to an infuriating klutz. The point in the game that lumps a series of bosses and time trials together forms an ugly clot which threatens the rude health of the rest of the adventure.

This is a sorely flawed game, but also a truly majestic one. No one should care about it because of the delayed-like-*Daikatana* gossip it's fuelled. No one should care about it because it has Toby Gard's name attached. You should care because it's a beautiful and ambitious manifesto for what games can give you that nothing else can.

Edge rating: **Seven** out of **ten**

Red Dead Revolver

Format: **Xbox (version tested) PS2** Publisher: **Rockstar** Developer: **Rockstar San Diego** Price: **£40** Release: **May 28**



Your regular character is Red Harlow, the quintessential shadowy stranger whose bluff demeanour betrays more than a hint of Eastwood. He returns to Brimstone to right some ancient wrongs







Secondary characters are playable for single-level missions. Annie Oakes is a feisty farm owner whose shotgun-toting, buffalo-riding episode proves to be one of the game's highlights

Inscrutable strangers in wide-brimmed hats pulled down low to obscure stubble-flecked faces. Bourbon-swigging drunks slumped outside the saloon. Sheriffs with waxed moustaches chewing on cigar stumps. Cowboy boots and spurs, ponchos and leather chaps. Spitting in the dust, hands wavering over holsters and a showdown at high noon. The harmonica playing dolefully as hooves clatter towards the sunset.

Wild west imagery is so indelibly etched on our collective consciousness thanks to the films of John Ford, Sergio Leone and Clint Eastwood (and countless subsequent imitations and parodies), it's strange that videogame cowboy capers should be so scarce. The sullen, single-minded heroes, the showy gunplay and the frontier-town anarchy that are staples of the modern action game are also essentials of every western narrative. Dress Agent 47, Max Payne or even Solid Snake in a filthy poncho, replace the semi-automatic with a clunky revolver, and have them traipsing down dusty roads instead of grey, industrial corridors, and you've got yourself a western adventure.

Except, until now, few have bothered. Put it down to obsessions with flashy gadgetry and dark futures, but *Red Dead Revolver* is a great trick that most other publishers have missed. Of course, Rockstar's ability to successfully suck up every aspect of a pop culture genre and regurgitate it with knowing, affectionate humour in game form is second to none. *Red Dead* is to westerns what *GTA* is to gangster movies. Every single cowboy cliché in existence is acknowledged and utilised to enhance the game in some way.

The impact of Rockstar's cultural comprehensiveness is immediately apparent in gameplay terms. The relatively straightforward thirdperson shooter format is constantly invigorated with ingenious variations. In one level, you're chasing a band of outlaws across the roof of a train; in another, you're in the thick of a saloon bar brawl with broken bottles as your only weapon; you even get to ride a buffalo, if you can wriggle your way out of a lasso. The new techniques required each time can be mastered in seconds and you're on the next level before you have a chance to get bored.

Naturally there's a quick-draw feature, accompanied by a tense, atmospheric shift as a cut-scene shows a rival move his hand towards his holster. A flick of the right stick cleverly represents the drawing and aiming of your pistol, and if you're quick enough there's just enough time to train a stubborn target on your opponent's torso.

Most levels are frantic, with multiple enemies attacking you from various angles. The potential for confusion is great, but the game copes admirably and, while never perfect, *Red Dead*'s twin analogue stick control (left to move, right to look) is thoroughly natural. The camera fails occasionally but never dismally enough to spoil the fun, with the game's pace helping t

Rockstar's ability to suck up every aspect of a cultural genre and regurgitate it with knowing, affectionate humour is second to none

Previously in E112, E121, E134, E136









Each character has a special move. Red's is the Dead-Eye Aim, a distant relative of Max Payne's bullet time that allows you to place multiple targets on your enemy







Showdown hoedown

Story mode unlocks characters and arenas for the fourplayer splitscreen Showdown option (also available on Xbox Live). Standard deathmatch rules are enforced, although as each character always carries their default weapon, it's often unfairly weighted. One-on-one play encourages enjoyably tense standoffs but, again, a poor weapon distribution mechanic provides an unfair advantage to whoever gets the first kill. The two-player High Noon (quick draw) option is a quirky novelty, but you won't play it more than twice.

obscure its undeniable rough edges. The targeting system is forgiving, allowing for a preponderance of satisfyingly explosive headshots. The hide-and-shoot mechanism, allowing you to target enemies while remaining shielded, is effective. Occasionally, the best techniques for dispatching resilient enemies are cruder than those presumably intended by the developer, as standing a foot away while repeatedly unloading a rapid reload rifle into an enemy's face usually works a treat. This may add weight to the claim that *Red Dead Revolver* is a little too easy, and the endless continues underline Rockstar's sympathetic approach.

Ultimately, though, *Red Dead* is intended as a joyful blast – an antidote to the current vogue for ponderous stealth titles. There is little replay value, and the multiplayer modes are slight, but six hours in Rockstar's riotous wild west is generally preferable to 12 spent straddling a dark corridor.

Most game developers struggle with the implementation of humour and reference, settling either for juvenile innuendo or generic, po-faced Hollywood pulp. Rockstar again proves itself to be the exception, with *Red Dead*'s genuinely amusing parade of pantomime villains (from psycho undertaker Mr Black to 'Pig' Josh and his freak circus) and knowingly hackneyed heroes (of which plummy, pistol-spinning gent Jack Swift is a favourite). Gameplay purists may scowl, but *Red Dead Revolver* is a triumph for beautifully observed atmospherics, characterisation and slapstick set-pieces you cannot fail to enjoy. This is how the west was won.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Resident Evil: Outbreak

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house** Price: **$50 (£30)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)** Previously in **E**125, **E**129, **E**133















Jump scares and splashes of brain matter: *Outbreak* treads such familiar ground the footprints haven't dried from the last time around. In contrast, fresh co-operative elements are underused

Outbreak has much in common with the zombies stalking its locales: it's a lumbering, occasionally scary and often unintentionally comical mess. It's also well intentioned – which conversely isn't a trait often brought out by the T-virus – but not enough to excuse its crippling faults.

Taken as a standard series instalment, it's an uneven romp through five scenarios covering the events of the Racoon City cycle. Two companions accompany your chosen character, and with judicious ordering about they'll usually survive to the conclusion. As noted in the preview in **E**133, their incessant and often absurdly inappropriate chatter quickly destroys the oppressive atmosphere – but at least it's amusing, something that can't be said of the will-sapping loading times. They comprehensively drain the game of urgency and direction, especially in the scenarios that involve a relentless oncoming zombie tide. Coupled with cut-scenes that require another two bouts of loading, disc access becomes the truly inevitable horror.

Though the ESRB warning optimistically suggests the Experience May Change During Online Play, it retains all of the singleplayer game's issues and compounds them. The railroaded progression precludes splitting up to tackle multiple objectives, and the lack of communication beyond stock phrases – even keyboard input is unsupported in-game – makes for an utterly unreadable atmosphere.

The greatest irony is that the human characters appear more bot-like than the AI, striding through scenarios with mechanical (and often eerily silent) urgency. Players are generally supportive, but there's a sense of it being a necessary evil rather than a question of communal survival. Even the game's most involving mechanic, the ability to shoulder a wounded player and drag them out of harm's way, is as often rebuffed as it is accepted – they'd prefer to die horribly with pride intact.

It's almost understandable, given how littl worth each player has other than as another pair of hands to go through the motions. As with *Ico*'s twoplayer mode, the human dynamic is irrelevant within the rigid plot, and the only real opportunities to improvise are th likes of shutting yourself in a locker with a vita item and refusing to re-emerge.

Aptly, *Outbreak* is an experiment gone wrong: it indicates the possibilities of an onlin horror title, but also that *Resident Evil*'s traditional structure can't achieve them.

Edge rating: **Five** out of te

Hitman Contracts

Format: **PS2 (version tested), PC, Xbox** Publisher: **Eidos** Developer: **IO Interactive** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E133**

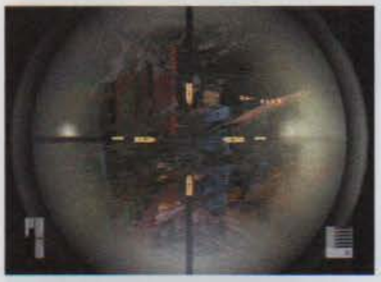
There's a point where rage capsizes and sinks into a cold, calm determination to do harm. There's a time when the disdain of leaving every enemy unharmed, bar one, is a greater violation than laying waste to them all. *Contracts* inhabits a more stable space around this point than the preceding *Hitman* games, though the difference is perhaps not as great as it could be. Nevertheless, even with stealth proliferating, 47's icy work stands as something different.

As the beautifully formed (and beautifully brief) cut-scenes show, IO Interactive remains true to an almost machine-like character unburdened by patriotism, ideology or revenge. The picaresque form allows the levels to function as discrete puzzles rather than as parts of a story arc: the objective remains pure and always the same. The obstacles and the methods open to you are what change, and it's in these areas that *Contracts* has both expanded and improved.

Levels are notably larger and, despite extra detail boosting already sumptuous looks, as smooth as skin. In fact, some maps initially seem too large – Beldingford Manor, for instance, is bewildering. Such is the nature of choice, though, and exploration converts directionless wandering and meaningless discoveries into a spreading web of possibilities. More ways in and out of key areas mean more solutions, from basic carnage to ghostly stealth, while extra situational fatalities await discovery. In the aforementioned manor, for instance, it's possible to drop a fuel can down a chimney to incinerate a target, but how to get it into place without arousing suspicion? Do you use hidden passages, stealth, misdirection, disguises – or a more subtle way altogether? The lure of the spotless execution (rewarded with special weaponry) and the range of deaths mean *Hitman Contracts* matures over time and enjoys enviable replay value.

Negatives? Each level bears its own internal logic (only obvious after the fact) as well as a looser overarching one, making it hard to know what is suspicious in any given situation. Even this logic has holes, making for some frustrating reloading for those keen to avoid alarms. The AI can be insanely blithe or supernaturally aware at random, and glancing headshots leave enemies sprightly as lambs. Yet the challenge remains an attractive one; the cold determination to do harm is stronger than ever.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten




Unpacking the sniper rifle – *Hitman*'s most fetishised weapon – means a brief cutscene





Locations can seem overwhelmingly sprawling at first, but once familiar represent an impressive array of possibilities. Violent incursions can reveal useful information for subsequent stealthier plays

I'll play with your blood

For a game that smiles upon the stylish dismissal of 'extracurricular' violence, *Hitman Contracts* does confrontation with surprising glee. Weaponry such as twin silenced 'ballers or shotguns throw enemies upside down across rooms in a Jackson Pollock of their own blood. For a hitman it's rather delicious... which makes it even harder to stay holstered when guards yell and sprint after you. Steady, though – they may simply scratch their heads and back off, saving you a potentially fatal firefight with everyone within earshot.

Powerdrome

Format: **PS2, Xbox (version tested)** Publisher: **Evolved** Developer: **Argonaut Sheffield** Price: **£30** Release: **May 21**









The music refuses to fall into the lazy category of thumping techno mush, choosing instead to offer up some interesting, but fitting, tribal beats and rhythms



PS2 PS

The PS2 version manages to retain an impressive amount of visual flair, keeping the sense of speed and scale intact. There's far less sheen, in the form of reflections and ripples that set off the skies and surfaces to such vivid effect, but the core of the play is reproduced exactly. Strangely, the PS2 version offers a more accessible race due to the use of arrows to prompt corners, a feature absent from the Xbox instalment.



The Acer Naim ringworld is one of the game's many visual highlights. It's bright, colourful and clean, but no less detailed for it. The warm, fuzzed glow of the sunset is one of the classiest effects around

It's hard to shake the feeling of the generic when playing a racing game featuring futuristic hover vehicles. The sensation of travelling on a massive cushion of air, of cornering with a braking allowance so generous that it's the timing and anticipation of the turn that are more crucial than the actual line taken: it's all here, just as it was in *Wipeout*, *Quantum Redshift* and any game that appears to be from the same stable or, rather, pigeonhole.

The nearest *Powerdrome* gets to a claim to the generic, however, is in its bland, plasticky characters and the air-punching soundbites they shout during the race. Instead, although the track layout is rarely anything more flamboyant than combinations of dips, chicanes and cavernous curves, the worlds within which they're set are freshly beautiful. Dense with detail, the environments bring with them a varied palette of colours, enriched with haze and brightening effects that give less an impression of lazy, processor-easing fogging and more a sense of incredible speed. It's no faster than *F-Zero*, but that wealth of detail and scale gives the impression of greater speeds.

The boosting system is a mix of *Project Gotham*'s self-preservation and *Burnout*'s self-perpetuating risk. Race without clipping any barriers or opponents and your boost bar fills. The faster you travel, the swifter it replenishes. It's a neat idea that gives time-trial play an addictive depth, but makes the races feel unfairly capitalist at times: those at the front get to stay there, while those jostling in the pack are prevented from racing through the ranks as each attempt at boost building is foiled by a nudge from the rear.

During the winding, more demanding tracks, that pack remains incredibly tightly knit, meaning that the difference between first and fifth is rarely anything more than a tenth c a second. If you're trapped behind the pack, you begin to feel that your opponent is, unfairly, just one vehicle five times your size, and working your way on to the podium can be a frustrating, bullied stutter.

Regardless, the control is crisp and smooth, and the sensation of riding on a blanket of air is excellently conveyed. It looks great, and the boosting system means that, as a time-trial game, it's fantastic. If your progress wasn't so easily sabotaged by a thoughtless collision, it would be a fantastic racer, too.

Edge rating: Seven out of te

Painkiller

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Dreamcatcher** Developer: **People Can Fly** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**133

Repetitive. Repetitive like developers dragging out the same old conventions again and again. A firstperson shooter of the most direct kind – you, guns, monsters and an almost entirely irrelevant plot brought together with predictably bloody results and everything turned up – larger levels, bigger monsters, louder guns and more accurate physics. The only things smaller, predictably, are the female character's garments.

Repetitive like the *wrong* kind of repetitive. Most of the greatest arcade games – a lineage *Painkiller* is attempting to follow – are those in which you find a rhythm and follow it, lock into a groove of violence. The most obvious reference point for *Painkiller* is *Serious Sam*, the from-nowhere game that made an indie fave of Croatian developer Croteam. On the surface it's *Doom* retroism, but more about constant action instead of punctuated violence. It's reliant on wide-open arenas filled with creatures, but where *Serious Sam* organised the onslaught to challenge the gamer, for the vast majority of *Painkiller*'s levels its designers seem to think it enough to put the character close to the opposition and let nature take its course. It isn't.

Repetitive like replaying a level for what seems like no real fault of your own. While action is constant you rarely feel genuinely threatened, and the main hits you'll take are accidental. To its credit, the developer realises what an essentially arena-based game it has made, and recharges your health at each save point. It's a rare moment of insight in a game where many of the fundamentals are badly misjudged. Even the energy spheres the opposition deposit after death appear after a long delay, grating for those trying for high scores.

Repetitive like hammering the space bar, as People Can Fly resurrects the bunny-hop from mid-period id games. Jumping to a specific pattern makes the character move faster. Hop. Hop. Hop. Backwards steps.

Repetitive like circling a towering boss, firing, inching down its gargantuan energy bar. Repetitive that in a world where games as varied as *Far Cry*, *Halo*, *Flashpoint*, *Deus Ex* and *Serious Sam* have shown the dozens of ways the genre can still excel, games as limited as this keep being made.

If you're looking for a sparklingly attractive shooter with a side order of slinky physics, this delivers the goods. But it's about as average as FPS gaming gets.

Edge rating: Five out of ten











Expansive frontiers, and huge bosses, are presented to the player. Sadly, the design fails to offer such an inspiring panorama





***Painkiller* at least looks lovely, and will push your PC. The proprietory engine makes use of all sorts of lighting, reflections, bump-mapping and texture effects, as well as the Havok 2 physics library**

Cards sharp

Apart from its physics – which is chiefly used for demolition and enemy deaths – *Painkiller*'s most interesting feature is collecting a tarot deck of powers. Each level comes with a challenge that, upon completion, gifts you a card that can be used in the main level to allow an extra ability. Of main appeal to the perfectionist gamer rather than their utilitarian function as, if you're mastering the levels, you don't actually *need* any extra abilities to progress.

The Suffering

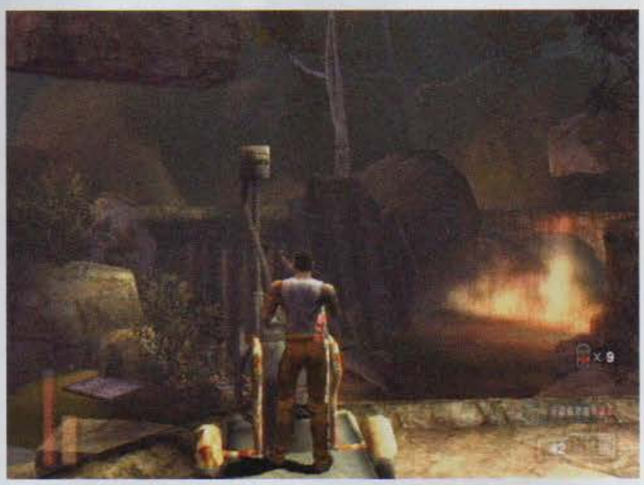
Format: **PS2 (version tested) Xbox** Publisher: **Midway** Developer: **Surreal Software** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E**125, **E**136









When Torque's insanity meter reaches the top you can press a button and he turns into a hulking brute. It hinders as much as it helps



Losing the plot

It's sad to say, but *The Suffering* is another example of dire plotting. Flashbacks pepper the action as protagonist Torque tries to escape Carnate Island, home to both a mental institution and a maximum security prison. Supernatural elements mix with medical experimentation clichés to produce a plot of mediocre standards. You get a different ending depending on your actions, but by the end you no longer really care.



The flashlight plays an important role in the opening moments of the game and generates tension as the batteries run dry. However, there are too many refills and its use becomes less relevant later on

For the best game experience, adjust your TV's brightness' suggests the opening screen of the game. As if to say: it's crucial because the subtle difference between light and shadow is going to profoundly affect your appreciation of the psychological horrors about to be served up. If only. *The Suffering* has a few weak shocks but is about as terrifying as an episode of 'Doomwatch.'

Generous health pickups and anaemic monsters deprive it of the fear it's so desperate to instill in the player. Only in the opening segment of the game, when you first break out of your prison cell (see 'Losing the plot') with nothing to defend yourself with but a shiv, is there any sense of tension. This is a guns-blazing thirdperson shooter – if it moves, blast it. Which is fine as far as it goes, but don't expect any clever *Silent Hill*-style terror tactics.

Although the monsters rarely deliver enough damage to kill, they have been created with imagination. Set in a prison's death row, each creature embodies a form of execution. The Mainliners best exemplify the theme, leaking lethal-injection blood when hurt and sporting eyeballs pierced with syringes. Stop moving and they're also liable to lob a syringe in your direction – a hit resulting in an impressively woozy-headed screen blur.

Animation is excellent and shots plugged into creatures have a visible effect, ramping up the thrill of discharging a shotgun blast or a burst from a Tommy gun. Heads explode, bodies split apart and, in one fine piece of creature design, a monster with blades for arms can be made to dangle limply from the ceiling, its limb still embedded in the roof.

The Suffering's main failing, however, is that all the ground creatures are dispatched with the all-too-familiar circle-strafe method. There are not too many of them, either, which limits any possibility of a strategic challenge to balance the shoot-anything-that-moves approach. A firstperson mode is available but the frenzied firefights become predictable too quickly. Only the Burrowers offer another method of dispatch – a flashbang grenade or TNT stick thrown down their holes.

Regardless, this is a surprisingly characterful effort from Midway, a company that hasn't had success with an original concept for a long while. Had the level design been a touch more ingenious, and the creatures exhibited more guile, this could have been memorable.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Steel Battalion: Line Of Contact

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **Nude Maker** Price: **£40 (£120 including controller)** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E125**

Boundless creativity can sometimes hold you back as much as push you forward. *Steel Battalion* had a mixed reception, but it was suspected the ambitious franchise would eventually move to where it belonged: online.

What let the first game down was not just that the work ethic was too demanding but that the payoff was pretty mean. Mastering the 40-button controller was an impressive achievement, but there was no applause for your feats of dexterity. By contrast, the vibrant community *Line Of Contact* supports rewards able players with audible kudos. The game itself joins in, recording details such as number of victories, preferred Vertical Tank, modus operandi and idiosyncrasies such as nickname and favourite colour. Everyone can view them, providing pre-match chatter and a clear indication of other players' skill levels.

That chatter is crucial – conversation here is more relevant to the game universe than it is in most Xbox Live titles. Almost everyone speaks in *Steel Battalion* jargon, extending their role beyond the confines of their cockpit. It's partly because sharing arcane knowledge is an expression of mastery and, importantly, the dissemination of information to co-pilots is critical in maintaining the element of surprise.

All VTs are afflicted with a cumbersome turning circle and weak rear armour. If you're cunning enough to get behind, they're toast. This simple Achilles' heel is perfectly combined with cleverly designed levels, packed with strategic footholds and pitfalls. As such, the teams' start positions represent a deliberate lack of even-handedness, sometimes spilling over into frustration.

Although the game and graphics engine have been lifted from *Steel Battalion*, most of that game's faults have been exorcised. Players of varying skill replace the defective AI, while the harsh save structure has also been tweaked. It's still possible to have a pilot erased for not ejecting in time, but this time you're rewarded for taking part, win or lose.

Sadly, the experience is marred for European gamers. Demanding more bandwidth than the average Xbox Live game, the lack of European servers means games are limited to three-versus-three rather than fiveplayer teams. But even cut down, *Line Of Contact* attains a balance between dextrous expertise and socially motivated rewards. The franchise is now only a fraction away from realising its full potential.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

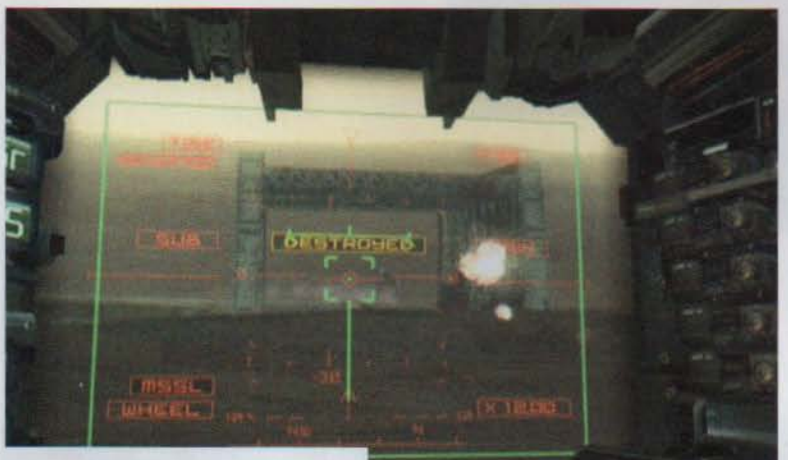








Communication is restricted to one co-pilot at a time; your communication dial toggles between them. Some specialist VTs are equipped with frequency interceptors that let you eavesdrop on enemies' conversations





Some of the more socially minded gamers have established a weekly 'driving school' to run through competencies like steering, shooting and window-washing. We expect to see plenty of Vertical Tanks falling over in comedy home video-type scenarios



Lost profits

Campaign mode applies the results of every skirmish on to a map at weekly intervals. Players are aligned with one of four armies from the original game, Hai Shi Dao, Pacific Rim, Right Brothers or Jaralaccs. After three months, the army with most territory is declared the overall victor. Pilots trade VTs via special chatrooms, and Capcom has even thrown limited-edition VTs into the mix, commanding high prices during auction sessions. Ultimately, profiteering can be just as important to the outcome of Campaign mode than the battles.

SingStar

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEE** Developer: **In-house (London Studio)** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

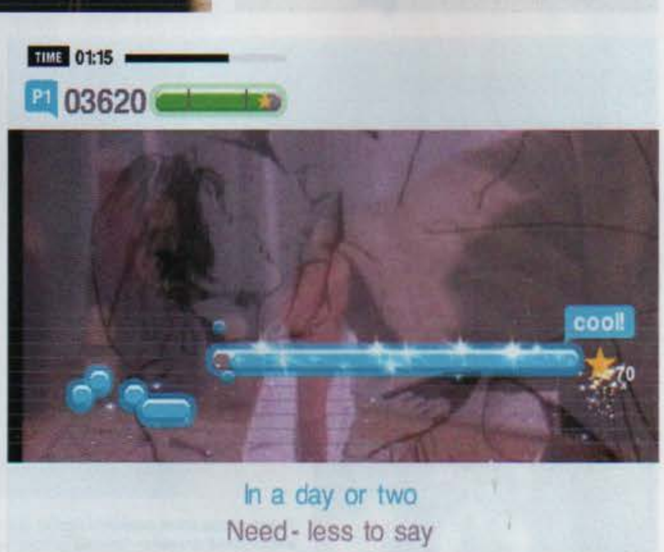












The addition of the music videos really does add to the experience, especially when classics such as A-ha's 'Take on Me' and Blondie's 'Heart Of Glass' are included

The basics are simple. You choose a track and the words are displayed along the bottom of the screen, much like any karaoke software, with the addition of the song's video in the background. As you sing into one of the two USB microphones, a series of lines on the screen indicate the correct timing and pitch of the track, while a second line shows the timing and pitch of the notes you are actually singing. When they meet, you score points.

But this is not a karaoke game – it's a singing game. While karaoke is about performance, *SingStar* is interested only in your pitch and timing – the only extra points for putting additional oomph into your delivery will come from bystanders. You can sing any words you like or even hum – so long as your timing and pitch are correct, *SingStar* will have no complaints. There are various modes to warble through, from singleplayer Career mode to a huge variety of co-operative and competitive multiplayer options, including a party game for 16.

The most intriguing aspect of the title is that despite having all the component parts of a game – points, levels, competition – it is as far from conventional game software as can be imagined. No conventional gaming skill will help, not even rhythm – it's all about the quality of the player's voice. And herein lies the magic. *SingStar* teaches you to sing. You never realise it's happening, but slowly you get better at hitting the notes. Your voice becomes used to belting out those notes, and having a constant measure of your success allows you to adjust your pitch.

The song list is the key to successful karaoke, because everybody needs to find something they can sing, and *SingStar* delivers 30 songs ranging from classic soul through heavy metal to pop. But while anyone could sing a few of these, there are simply too few to provide any kind of lasting appeal. Sony appears to have ceased planning add-ons to concentrate on a sequel, and this really does affect *SingStar*'s value. Much like EyeToy, this is entertainment best suited to parties, and it delivers a remarkable and original novelty, but not much more beyond that. Still, it's impossibly great fun while the novelty lasts, especially when you have a really big crowd gathered to take part.

Putting a mark to such an unusual and brave piece of software is a difficult task. Is *SingStar* revolutionary? Certainly. But ten out of ten? Certainly not.

Edge rating: **Eight out of ten**

Serious Sam: Next Encounter

Format: **PS2 (version tested) GC** Publisher: **Take 2** Developer: **Climax** Price: **£20** Release: **Out now**

No longer a conversion, not yet a sequel. *Serious Sam: Next Encounter* seems to confidently occupy a middle ground between the two, bringing new weapons and enemies, along with entirely fresh settings for its new – and traditionally maltreated – console audience. Although, considering *Serious Sam*'s typically one-note nature, a mod is as good as a change.

A relaxed auto-aim and a doped-up lookspring counter any inadequacy on the part of the Dual Shock's sticks. A new combo system is featured, based sensibly on chaining kills in swift succession, as opposed to the strained multikill bonus from Xbox *Serious Sam*. Checkpoints are used for respawns, creating a more acceptable balance between the quicksave demands of the PC original and the mollycoddling 1UP extravaganza of the Xbox version.

Thoughtful tweaks, then, but none of the new enemy types bring with them anything close to the imagination and out-and-out terror of classic *Sam* foes like the infamous Headless Kamikazes or the thundering, locomotive Werebulls. Level design feels flat, too, and there's nothing here that redefines the experience any, or manages to match up to the grandeur of *Second Encounter*'s incredible Valley Of The Jaguar. The environments feel wide open, but lack intricacy and are blocky, simplistic affairs. If that's the price of keeping the action as frantic and precise as the series deserves, then so be it; it's no less robust a canvas for the carnage, and it's a preferable trade-off to the game losing any of its cavernous scale or astronomical enemy head counts.

Despite that, *Next Encounter* is one of the grandest and busiest console battlefields yet created. This is a spiritual update to *Space Invaders*, a one-trick pony that kicks harder than most FPS thoroughbreds, making the *Medal Of Honor* series seem like a vain diva by comparison. Wave after wave of enemies spawn out of thin air like angry bees from some invisible hive, and you knock them down with an uncomplicated mixture of relentless gunfire and crowd management. It's an honest, hard-working shoot 'em up, the polar opposite to those war games obsessed with 'cinematic' experience.

Next Encounter captures the solidity, intensity and scale of the series, but no more. It's a conversion after all, then, albeit one that's strafed a little to the right.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten









The 'Lost Levels' are bonus stages unlocked by earning gold medals. These medal awards, along with the combo meter and checkpoint system, give it the kind of high-score focus that other *Serious Sam* games have lacked





A solid splitscreen co-op mode is available, cementing the game as a far greater technical achievement than it first appears. No single visual aspect of the game is glamorous, sure, but to see mile-wide environments host a stampeding cast of hundreds is impressive



Hell on wheels

A rocket-firing RV is also available during certain levels, but it's nothing more than a speedy spin on temporary invulnerability. Considering the blaring, monotone procession of combat that makes up the entirety of a *Serious Sam* game, maybe it's churlish to ask for anything more.

Seven Samurai 20XX

Format: **PS2** Publisher: **Sammy** Developer: **Dimps** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**135









Natoe can perform a Just attack and a Just dash – these move him directly next to or behind an enemy to perform a killer slice. However, in the frenzy of combat, and with the all-powerful double-sword attack engaged, these prove unnecessary for victory. The fighting gets very tiresome

The Seven Samurai in space. Not a bad premise for a videogame, but one that has been woefully mishandled by Sammy. As in Kurosawa's epic, a group of warriors must be assembled to protect a village from marauding bandits. In this case, nasty intergalactic 'humanoids'.

There are some inane wandering around and chatting bits, but in the main this is hack-and-slashery at its most basic. It's disappointing that you only get to play as one of the heroes, but even more upsetting that you can clear the game with the most rudimentary of moves: a double-sword attack that charges up after a brief time, then you hit the square button as fast as is humanly possible. There's a guard command and a few dash and combo attacks, but they are largely redundant.

Sure, the production values are high and the narrative is updated with humour, but this is barely a game. The lightshow that engulfs your samurai as he pulls off some impressively animated swirls and thrusts looks spectacular, but it's all smoke and mirrors. You may win every battle, but underneath you know you're no hero.

Edge rating: Two out of ten

Armored Core Nexus

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **From Software** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£35)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)** Previously in **E**131

For a name that carries as much weight as *Armored Core*, it's surprising how few gamers have a real sense of what the game offers. *Nexus*, a lavish double pack offering a whole new game and dozens of missions from previous incarnations, ought to offer a perfect starting point.

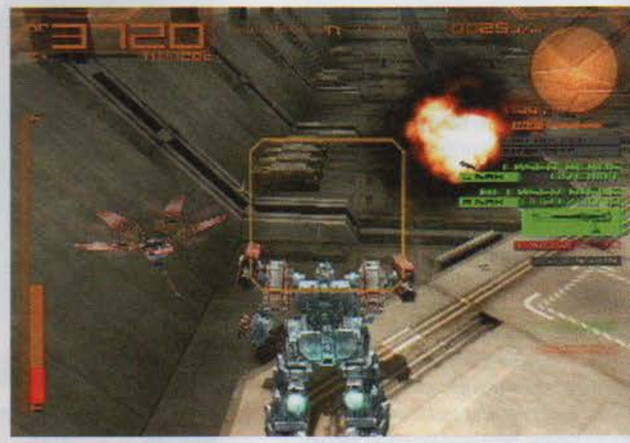
As the standard bearer for mech building and fighting, *Armored Core*'s depth is still as profound: combinations of weapons and limbs, radiators and boosters remain astronomical. As does the variety of the missions: tight arenas, dizzying climbs, sniper infiltrations and massed brawls. The greater emphasis on overheat and a new tuning system will be to the taste of some veterans and not others, but the beauty of the machines will please all.

For newcomers, the learning curve is still sheer. The menus are too cumbersome to easily allow detailed component comparison, and the complex mission structure makes difficult the extended trial and error needed by students of the game. The biggest draw is the move to twin analogue control, which opens this unique blend of the cerebral and the brutal to a new audience.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten









As well as the new analogue control scheme, the old system is also available for those who are accustomed to it. The vertiginous sense of fully three-dimensional space is as strong as ever

RalliSport Challenge 2

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Microsoft Game Studios** Developer: **DICE** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

The sequel to the adequate, if unspectacular, first rally effort available on Xbox, *RalliSport Challenge 2* is at least as accessible and as instantly agreeable as its predecessor.

A Career mode with a branching structure allows you to choose from the various categories (rally, ice racing, hillclimb, rallicross and super special stages) although text-heavy presentation ensures things feel impersonal and overly lifeless.

Of more concern is the handling, which allows cars to be thrown around the (well-crafted) tracks with reckless abandon. This will undoubtedly please anyone who finds the driving model offered by Codemasters' *Colin McRae* games initially daunting but the lack of complexity eventually grates.

Which is a shame, because the game is often capable of producing some genuine heart-in-mouth moments. In singleplayer it's fun and surprisingly engaging, although all but the most forgiving player should find monotony eventually sets in. Thankfully, the prospect of Live compatibility ensures further longevity. Like the first game, it remains a competent but ultimately restrained title.

Edge rating: Six out of ten









In addition to the variety of rally modes, events themselves tend to mix stages from different nations to maintain interest

Singles: Flirt Up Your Life

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Koch** Developer: **Deep Silver** Price: **£20** Release: **Out now**

Previously in E134



While including an array of Sim-like activities, most take distinct secondary importance to relationship building





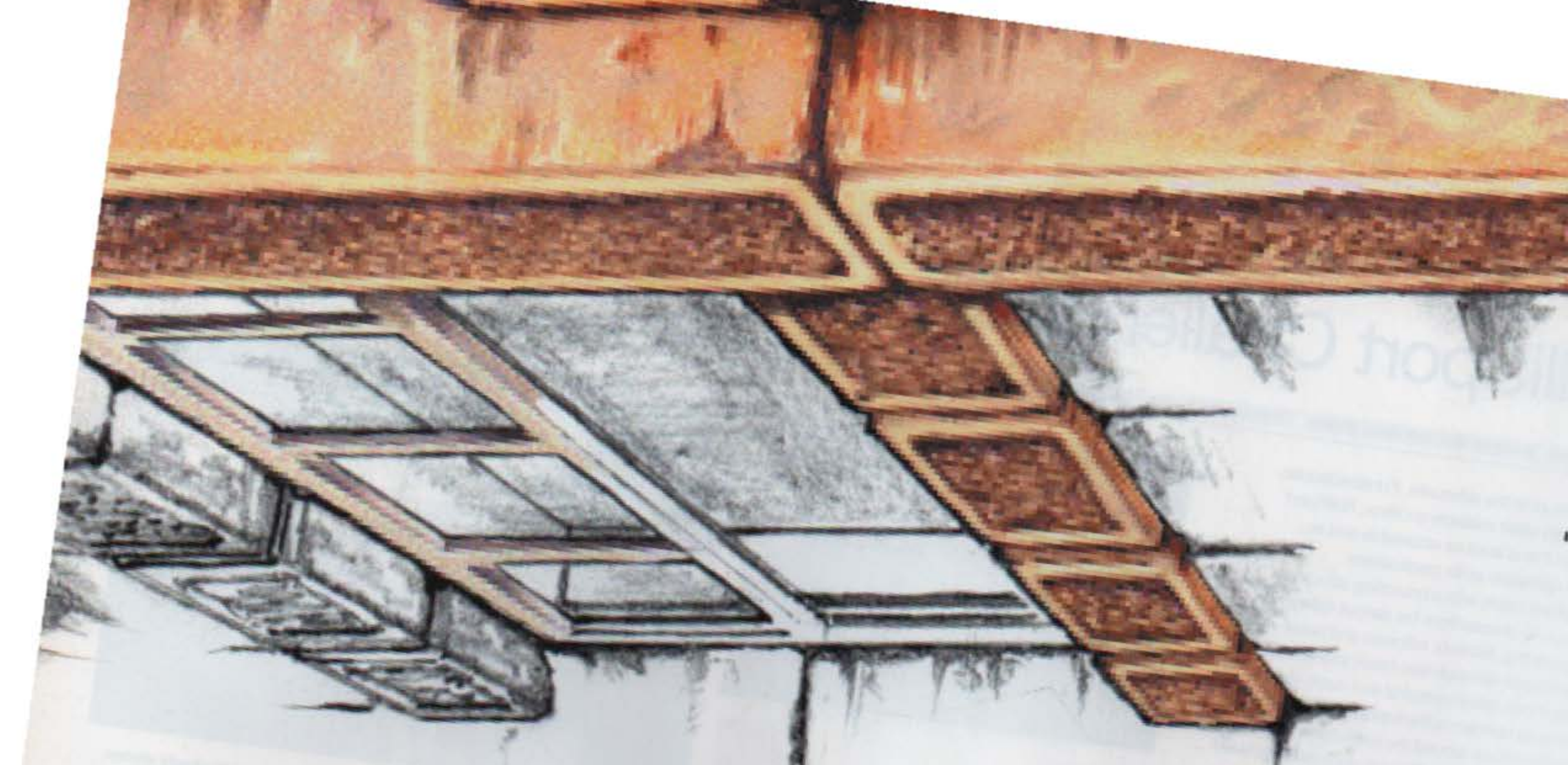


It's one of the top two primal human urges. In industrialised societies, it's the dominant one, so when there are more games about flying than glorious physical congress and the pursuit thereof, there's clearly a niche to be filled.

While Maxis' world-conquering *The Sims* was more than a little vague in that area, *Singles* goes considerably further into the domain of the heart. At least visually, that is. Mechanics of seduction – selecting generalised conversation options such as Flirt or Joke to increase characters' affection for one another – remain virtually identical. However, *The Sims* doesn't include options to grope each other on the sofa, for example.

Relationships can be tough, of course, and perhaps that's the logic behind *Singles* reducing the possibilities to just your flatmate. This reduces the limits of the game, making it a rather slow and pointless repetition of Eat, Sleep, Work and Flirt until you pass out. Voyeurs will be disappointed, since the sex portrayed is the very model of conventionality. The really shocking thing is how close *Singles* gets to being wholesome.

Edge rating: Four out of ten



The making of...

Broken Sword

Shadow Of The Templars

Charles Cecil's £1million adventure game made a big splash upon its release, much like the event that sparked its creation...

Original format: **PC**
Publisher: **Virgin Games**
Developer: **Revolution**
Origin: **UK**
Original release date: **1996**

November 5, 1991. Robert Maxwell – entrepreneur, former Labour MP, Mirror Group owner, notorious firebrand and, posthumously, disgraced fraudster – drowned in waters off the Canary Isles in unknown circumstances. It may seem bizarre at first reading, but this event also had a profound influence on the UK gaming industry. At the time, Maxwell's software house Mirrorsoft had a stable of British development talent – including Sensible Software, the Bitmap Brothers and a start-up called Revolution, among others – and was almost certain to become a publishing superpower. It was not to be. As the empire crumbled following Maxwell's demise, Mirrorsoft was put into receivership and disappeared from the pages of game industry history. The closure of Mirrorsoft also, obliquely and with a certain irony, led to the creation of a famous graphic adventure with conspiracy theories at the heart of its engrossing tale. It was *Broken Sword: Shadow Of The Templars*.















Regard almost any still of *Broken Sword*, and its aesthetic virtues are so very tangible: it looks every bit the £1million it cost to make. And, unlike the later, similarly lavish Virgin adventure *Toonstruck*, it actually sold



Industry veteran and Revolution MD **Charles Cecil**'s early career as a creator of games was followed by stints as head of development at US Gold and, later, the troubled Activision of the late '80s. "When things started going wrong at Activision, an industry friend called Sean Brennan, who was deputy managing director at Mirrorsoft, took me out to lunch and told me that if I wanted to set up a development company then Mirrorsoft would support us. And he was true to his word."

Revolution's debut graphic adventure, *Lure Of The Temptress*, was duly snapped up by Mirrorsoft but, as Cecil confirms, events elsewhere led to a change of publisher for his young company. "As we were nearing completion, we started a second game called *Beneath A Steel Sky*. And it was just at that time, just before *Lure Of The Temptress* was due to be published, that Robert Maxwell fell off his boat, or whatever happened. And this extraordinary company, Mirrorsoft, who were so aggressive in terms of signing up emerging development talent, just collapsed.

"Sean Brennan ended up working with Tim Cheney, who had just been appointed the managing director of Virgin Games, and they asked if we would bring our titles to Virgin, which is what we did.

"That really laid the foundation for *Broken Sword*. When the games came out, and were very successful, Virgin asked if we'd up the ante and write an adventure with higher production values. Sean, my wife Noirin and I were having dinner one evening. He had just read 'Foucault's Pendulum' by Umberto Eco and suggested that the Knights Templar might provide an interesting background for an adventure game. I only knew a little bit about them so it was a great opportunity to go to Paris and undertake some research.

"The history and the background proved to be perfect. You have an intriguing conspiracy that resonates to the present day, lost treasure; you have chivalry, barbarity; all of these elements coming together in semi-legend, semi-truth, provided a perfect historical backdrop for the game."

"You have an intriguing conspiracy that resonates to the present day, lost treasure; you have chivalry, barbarity all of these elements coming together in semi-legend"

Film influences

Cecil also cites Lucasfilm favourite 'Raiders Of The Lost Ark' as an inspiration. When we ask what encouraged the choice of a contemporary setting for Revolution's third adventure, he is quick to acknowledge Spielberg's action flick: "The way the film interweaved a story set in the 20th century with biblical and historical plot elements was incredibly effective. To this day it remains one of the best films of its genre."

When Revolution began the big-budget *Broken Sword* project in 1994 – its eventual cost was to the order of £1million, an eyebrow-raising sum for a UK production of that era – the vast majority of codeshops were self-contained creative entities. The practice of hiring external talent from the TV and film trades, while not unheard of, was certainly rare. *Broken Sword*'s unique aesthetics are a product, in part, of Revolution's then-unusual willingness to cast its gaze beyond its own premises, to seek external experience to compliment its in-house talent. Having worked with comic book artist Dave Gibbons on *Beneath A Steel Sky*, Cecil was enthusiastic to once again look for contributors outside the industry.

"I was in contact with Ballyfermot College in Dublin, and we were talking about whether we could employ some of their animation graduates," he explains. "I met Eoghan Cahill, one of the lecturers. Eoghan had worked as a background artist for the Don Bluth studio in Dublin, and the quality of his work was just breathtaking… he had such talent. He was semi-retired and was looking for change, looking for something new. He drew some test backgrounds, which we then coloured in Photoshop, and I was really excited by the look. We decided to go for the hand-drawn cartoon look."

Subsequently introduced to the respected Red Rover studio – which was later approached to create cartoons for Disney – and, as the *Broken Sword* workload grew, Fil Cartoons in Manila, Revolution's decision to outsource paid gloriously



evident dividends. The film and television composer Barrington Pheloung, an old friend of Cecil's, was drafted in to create the musical accompaniment. Aesthetically it was, and is, an atypical videogame: uniquely beautiful for its day, and blessed with near-unparalleled standards of animation. Cecil is keen, however, not to underplay the input of his in-house charges. "We had some really talented animators who had been with the firm right from the beginning who produced beautiful animation for in-game sections. Generally, we used external animators for the sequences and in-house animators for the in-game sections. It was a great combination."

That distinctive look

Broken Sword certainly did not look like a run-of-the-mill point 'n' click title, and Revolution was also keen to add its own refinements to the established genre template. While these were not as ambitious as, say, the company's earlier attempts at 'Virtual Theatre' in *Lure Of The Temptress* – in which supporting, AI-controlled cast members would engage in conversations with each other and interact with the world at large without player input – they nonetheless imbued *Shadow of the Templars* with a distinct feel and flavour. Most additions or alterations were purely mechanical, like the addition of a context-sensitive pointer. "We felt that we really should be giving the player more information – and that it was unacceptable that you should be going over to interact with an item, but have no idea what your action would be," comments Cecil.

Revolution's most notable deviation from standard point 'n' click practices, though, was to change the standard question-and-answer conversation system used in LucasArts adventures. "We broke away from the idea of printing what the protagonist was about to say in the way that, for example, *Monkey Island* did," Cecil explains. "For a slapstick game, their system works quite well – you're signalling the gag, but while *Broken Sword* was always intended to have humour, it was to be a more dry, subtle humour, and I thought it inappropriate to reveal to the player what was going to be said."

Broken Sword's alternative was to offer 'subject icons' – conversational prompts that, while ostensibly a simplification, actually imbued the adventure with a distinct feel. "The subject icons for conversations were interesting," agrees Cecil. "It meant we were moving the player away from the protagonist. Our intention was to make it feel more cinematic. We wanted people to empathise, rather than identifying directly with the character."

The dawn of the 'talkie'

While Cecil wrote *Broken Sword*'s story and designed many of its puzzles, script writing duties were performed by Dave Cummins, reprising his role on previous Revolution titles (and later assisted by Jonathan Howard). But *Broken Sword* was a CD-ROM-based 'talkie', one of the first. Revolution had prior experience with voice tracks (and had overcome a number of important hurdles) while producing *Beneath A Steel Sky* for Commodore's ill-fated CD32, but this was not a purely technical exercise for Cecil and team. The addition of a cast of voice actors instigated a subtle shift in the atmosphere of the graphic adventure; once interactive storybooks with silver screen pretensions, these stories abruptly became more tangibly related to their cinematic cousins, and would thus be judged on similar terms. By and large, and despite the occasional dubious accent, *Broken Sword*'s performances were solid enough to allow its engrossing story and engaging dialogue to shine through.

As the constituent elements of his £1million yarn were finally bolted together and sent for duplication, was Cecil delighted with *Broken Sword*? Did he feel his company had achieved something remarkable? "No," he replies, with surprising candour. "After every project we've ever written, I feel a sense of frustration that we could have done more – and there were elements of *Broken Sword* that I wished had been changed."

How, we enquire? "I knew you were going to ask that," Cecil replies with a laugh. "I think, in particular, there was too much dialogue, too much talking. In film writing, one of the golden rules is: hide your exposition. And I don't think we hid our exposition well enough. I think we could have cut 20 to 30 per cent of our dialogue. I think a lot of the script is extremely well-written. I think it was a bit verbose."

One million copies

Whatever reservations he might have had, *Broken Sword* was remarkably successful – particularly throughout Europe – selling over a million copies. Unfortunately, the manner in which it was marketed in the US left a lot to be desired, and it was also perplexingly re-christened *Circle Of Blood*: "For some bizarre reason, yes, it was," comments Cecil. "I have no idea why to this day. It was something we were very uneasy about. The name was wholly inappropriate, and sent completely the wrong signals about what type of game it was. It didn't help it commercially."

Having opened this article with mention of a fraudster, it's perhaps apt to end with a tale of an attempted shakedown. Basking in glowing press coverage and with copies of his game flying from shelves back in 1996, Cecil and his team had many reasons to be cheerful. Then, not so very long after its launch, a letter arrived from solicitors representing the author of a book named 'The Hiram's Key', accusing Revolution of stealing his ideas for *Broken Sword*. "I was naive, and quite worried," recalls Cecil. "So I asked: 'In what way do we infringe copyright?' They replied they couldn't say, as they didn't have a copy of the game – could we send them one? We then told them where to stuff their claim, and heard no more..."





A clown walks into this cafe, right, and... ahem. *Broken Sword*'s opening scenes (centre picture) abide as one of the more interesting story asides in adventure game history. It was a truly unique 'sell'





RESET

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 72, May 1999

'Is videogaming a 'cool' pursuit?' we asked in issue 72, the Designers Republic *Wipeout 3* covers and dust jackets taking the series to a different level of contemporary hipness. The editorial intro concluded that it wasn't exactly cool, but that at least it was now possible for gamers to 'come out.' History does not recall whether our declaration caused closeted gameplayers across the country to whip out their handhelds and play with them in public, but the acceptability can't have been harmed by Sega's £12m three-year deal to sponsor Arsenal. A source close to the company claimed it was prepared to "throw money at Dreamcast until it works." Unfortunately for Sega, the public weren't prepared to adopt the same attitude.

Then again, some neat DC software made its debut in **E**72 – extensive previews of *Soul Calibur*, *Shenmue*, *Metropolis Street Racer*, and, well, *Cool Boarders Dreamcast* all promised a brighter future for the £200 platform. Elsewhere, *Black & White* hit more delays, and the cover feature on *Wipeout 3* claimed 'evolution, not revolution.' Other focal points were Parental Advisory: Explicit Content which looked at, yes, advising parents about explicit content, and Painting By Numbers, which heralded the arrival of thirdparty development modules. Middleware was welcomed by almost everyone – except for **Jez San**, who said: "We have the coolest physics, the most photorealistic renderer, the largest fractal 3D planet compression and some other R&D going on." We wonder how that worked out on *Croc 2: Legend Of The Gobbos*.

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?
"We took him outside and beat him with a length of garden hose"
We assure a reader that one of our contributors won't be making another mistake in a hurry.

DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?
"You could have... a pink blob. And if it's made very clear that the pink blob is a pregnant woman, and the next collection of pixels is you with a gun..."
Gary Penn considers the future of *GTA*.

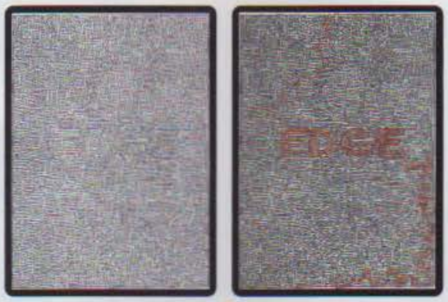
TESTSCREENS AND RATINGS:
Get Bass (DC; 7/10), *Machines* (PC; 7/10), *Expendable* (PC; 5/10), *Tanktics* (PC; 4/10), *Requiem* (PC; 6/10), *Official Formula 1 Racing* (PC; 6/10), *Super Speed Racing* (DC; 4/10), *Marvel Vs Capcom* (DC; 7/10), *Psychic Force 2012* (DC; 5/10), *Syphon Filter* (PS; 6/10) *Monaco Grand Prix Racing Simulation 2* (DC; 6/10)



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9

1. *MGS Integral*, with PocketStation compatibility and alternate outfits
2. *Get Bass*, one of Sega's most excellent follies
3. One of **Edge**'s oddest incovers ever, a maze. Did you actually try it?
4. Font: F500 ANG-ULAR by the Designers Republic. Just in case you were wondering
5. '*Super Mario 64*: Only for IBM PC' claims the box of this Hong Kong import
6. Diarist Demis Hassabis is a millionaire at 22
7. One eighth of Sega's European Dreamcast marketing budget
8. *Onimusha*, originally destined for PlayStation1
9. *Rival Schools 2*, also supporting PocketStation

inbox

Communicate by post:
Letters, **Edge**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW
Or email (stating 'Inbox' in the message header):
edge@futurenet.co.uk

Dear Shinji Mikami,

Since I do not know your address I have been forced to write this open letter to you through **Edge** (I am sure that you read it). Your wretched company Capcom has indirectly infuriated me to the point where my whole life has become a torrent of hatred that consumes my every waking hour.

You see, the recent flood of lovely-looking screenshots for the upcoming *Resident Evil 4* filled me with such anticipation that I decided to pick up and play the only instalment of the series I had never played before: *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*.

I was enjoying the experience very much until I reached a boss encounter with the game's titular villain. I have (at the time of writing) attempted to defeat that horrid piece of filth some 54 times without success. I believe that the fault lies not in my gameplaying skills but with the designers of the game. I realise that you yourself had little involvement with the making of *Resident Evil 3* and that you have returned to the series with the fourth instalment. So, my request to you is to go a little easier with the boss battles – they should be entertaining set pieces rather than the soul-destroying hunks of pain they had become by *Resident Evil 3*.

As it stands, I will probably never get to see about 60 per cent of the game I have paid good money for and have been left cold, bitter and resentful towards Capcom. Games should be enjoyable, not frustrating. I look forward to *Resident Evil 4* and hope it is just as fun as the first, please promise me that you will never abandon your franchise to those other, more cruel and hateful designers again.
Yours anxiously,
Ashley Day

While tidying a stack of DVDs and PS2 games I noticed that only the DVDs had their age rating printed on the spine. Could such a small ommission be one of the causes of games being played by inappropriate gamers? Would its inclusion help make parents understand the nature of the games that they permit (as well as purchase for) their children to play?
Pob

It's an interesting theory, but a quick check reveals that some games, including the likes of *Max Payne*, do indeed carry age ratings on their spines.

Another evening at home. I stood, staring out the window at the lashing rain, at the black puddles gathering under the damp sky. Everything was dull, everything was grey. The Lodger was playing *Max Payne 2*. A sequel, a repeat. For some reason it seemed ironic. Listlessly, I watched him play. The camera jumped around like it was attached to a firecracker. My eyes hurt just trying to keep up; this was no spectator sport. In Payne's world everything was as fragile as my head – buckets, boxes, shelves – kicked around like the flotsam and jetsam of my life. No rhyme, no reason, no way out. "You have to check for ammo and supplies," said The Lodger.

Everywhere he went he left a trail of destruction – the stealthy agent. Payne's feet tap-tap-tapped incessantly, every step accompanied by the faint squeak of leather. Someone had spent ages getting that sound just right. Someone had got it just wrong.

My head throbbed. Rat-a-tat-tat! The sound of bullets shot through my brain like bullets through a brain. The Lodger took a slow-motion dive across a grey room, firing as he fell. There was no one there to shoot, but the vending machine had had it coming. Progress was slow – Payne was inspecting every cupboard, drawer, nook and granny for extra ammunition and painkillers, double-checking every single locked door. I tried to keep calm, visualise myself somewhere cool and quiet, a silent hill somewhere. It just got worse. I couldn't take it any more. It was supposed to be a game, wasn't it? It didn't make sense, though – where was the fun in trying locked doors, doing slow-motion dives for no reason, shooting stuff 'just in case'? Something was wrong with the world. Either that, or there was something wrong with me. I had to get out, escape into the cooling rain. I had to find my Mona. If I could just remember where I'd put the key to the front door.
Chris Phelps

How is the videogame market ever going to mature in the eyes of the general public when games that take a 'morally neutral' position on an area like the Vietnam war are being heralded as intelligent, and serious videogame magazines write 'them and us' editorials that imagine that 'some of the pacificists' marching in London last year quite 'enjoy a spot of *Allied Assault*?'

Given that even those who support war as a means of resolving conflict wouldn't usually admit to enjoying it, taking a 'morally neutral' position on something like Vietnam, the by now well-documented war against peasants and farmers (and indeed whose effects through toxins like Agent Orange are still resounding today through deformed births and the like) is akin to taking a morally neutral position on sexual abuse or racism – something along the lines of the English cricket team's visit to South Africa in the '80s: "Hey, we're not taking a position on apartheid, we're just going to play!" You can't take a morally neutral position on some areas without implicitly condoning them.

What's depressing about the infatuation with war in the videogames industry at the moment is that it does nothing at all to dispel the myth of gaming being the hobby of teenage boys in their bedrooms shooting their loads over military simulations and drilling a round of synthetic ammo into a foreigner's back. Are we no further on than the notorious raping of a Native American woman by repeatedly pressing the fire button in *Custer's Last Stand* 24 years ago? To be 'morally neutral' about a whole range of areas disconnects an entire mass of the general population from the exact industry that still struggles to entice them in. Until the industry grows up and becomes a medium that's genuinely reflective of the society of which it's a part, and until whining fanboys stop reacting

Rat-a-tat-tat! The sound of bullets shot through my brain The Lodger took a dive across a room, firing as he fell. There was no one to shoot, but the vending machine had had it coming



Ashley Day hopes that *Resident Evil 4* will mark a return to the original game in terms of difficulty, lamenting part three's tricky boss encounters

histrionically in forums to the mere thought of self censorship or content discussion, it's doomed to remain a largely immature and unchallenging format in both perception and reality.
Mark Whitfield

We can't be drawn into the war debate on these pages for various reasons (space being just one), but you're right: the videogame industry is far from grown-up. In some respects, it's still in its adolescence, and many games are simply reflections of that. What is *Call Of Duty*, after all, but a modern-day version of war games we played as children, holding sticks as machine guns and making gunfire noises with our mouths? Ultimately, this is an area we'll look at in detail in the future.

An interesting contradiction struck me while reading RedEye's assessment of the initial Nintendo DS announcement along with the Trigger Happy comment on realism in games.

RedEye was suggesting that there is no need for two screens on a console as, for example, there is nothing wrong with pressing a button to show a map on the same screen. On the very next page, Steven Poole gives RedEye a very good reason why such a thing would be useful.

Pressing a button to change the screen to look at a map, in almost every case in the interest of fairness to the player, will effectively pause the game while the map is studied – hardly realistic. If, however, you have two screens available and the map permanently on show you then have the more believable scenario of being able to look at the map while keeping half an eye on what is going on in the main game.

Seems pretty useful to me, although I agree with RedEye in that Nintendo's examples of the second screen's use were ill thought out. The overall theme of the column was full of scepticism which we perhaps would expect from a hardened, time-served industry hack.

I think Nintendo deserves credit for trying something new. Yes, it may turn out to be an abject failure but the last thing we should be doing is bemoaning companies for being innovative. Until we fully understand the design, capabilities, and application of the system, let's reserve judgement.
Mark Forrester

We just want a *Punch Out* game on NDS. Would that be OK with you, Nintendo? Pretty please?

One statement in the article 'By approval only' (**E**134) has prompted me to write. The writer comes to the hypothesis that 'the assumption here is that a consumer who buys a bad PS2 game will then believe that the PS2 is a bad system'. Although, as correctly mentioned, the hardcore fanatic will have irrational brand loyalty, the average punter will buy their hardware on the strength of the software. For instance, in my case when deciding whether to make the purchase of a PS2 or Xbox, the quality of the games as well as the potential capability of the hardware played an overall important factor in the purchase. As much as the games available at the time swayed me towards the PS2, in the end the superior capabilities of the Xbox and more importantly the games (*Halo*, anyone?) won me over.

Most hardware providers I am sure understand the importance of having an enticing software suite to justify the initial purchase, but software maintains the status of the hardware during its lifecycle and promotes it to other prospective customers.

Software sells hardware, and no doubt developers know there is no point spending money developing for a tiny installed base especially with the ever-escalating cost of development. A vicious circle, but in today's cutthroat market the hardware suppliers are well aware of the fickle nature of the market (witness the overthrow of Nintendo from the top spot) better than anyone else.
Craig Allen

Fair enough, but you're not really 'the average punter'. The average punter does not really know the difference between Xbox and PS2 apart from the fact that Sony's machine got *Vice City* first. And that was probably enough to seal the deal.

Right, this is a rant aimed squarely at either developers or publishers, and it concerns the lack of left-handed controls in first/thirdperson console games that utilise both analogue controller sticks.

Having worked in this industry for the last six years (ie, since the birth of the double-stick analogue controller) it is shameful how the left-handed gamer has been ostracised. During the last 18 months I have worked on and played numerous titles that I would have purchased had they not had purely right-handed control setups. To name a few titles which do not support the left handed gamer: *Deus Ex* and now *Deus Ex 2*, *Rainbow Six 3*, *XIII* – I could go on. Titles which have support for left-handers are *TimeSplitters*, *Halo*, *SOCOM*, *Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter*, and I'm sure there are more I've neglected to add.

So it would appear that there are some dev teams out there that maybe do have the odd 'cack-handed' programmer, but is it really too much to ask a developer/publisher to include a left-handed option? This could merely be a case of implementing a software switch that would swap the functions of the sticks – surely a simple fix. I find this lack of thought for us left-handers, who may be in a minority, to be yet another black mark for a publisher only interested in generating large sell-through numbers. If sales are to be maximised due to ever-increasing development costs you would think they would want to attract as many potential sales as possible.

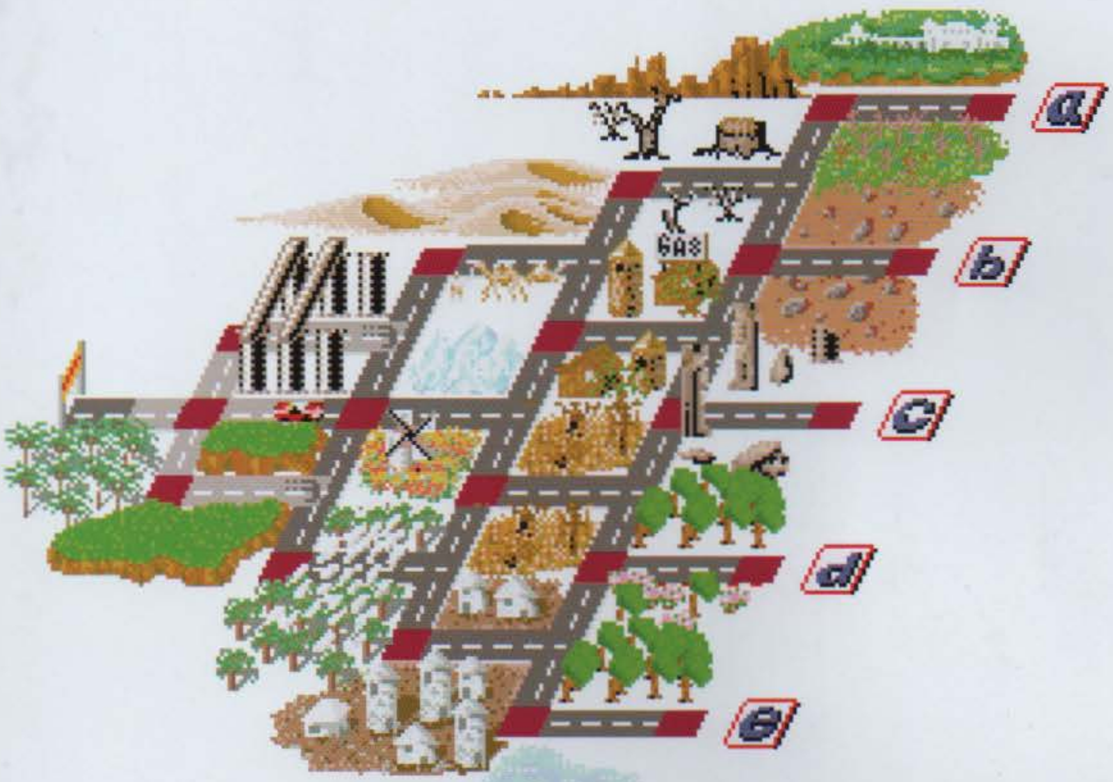
We may only be a small percentage of sales forecasts (obviously not enough to warrant any real consideration) but at the end of the day it's all money in the bank and seeing the numerous rehashes and lacklustre titles out there it would appear that revenue still comes before quality or consideration for the end user.
Cack Hander

Your comments, please, game makers.

I think Nintendo deserves credit for trying something new. Yes, it may turn out to be an abject failure, but the last thing we should be doing is bemoaning companies for being innovative

Next month




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